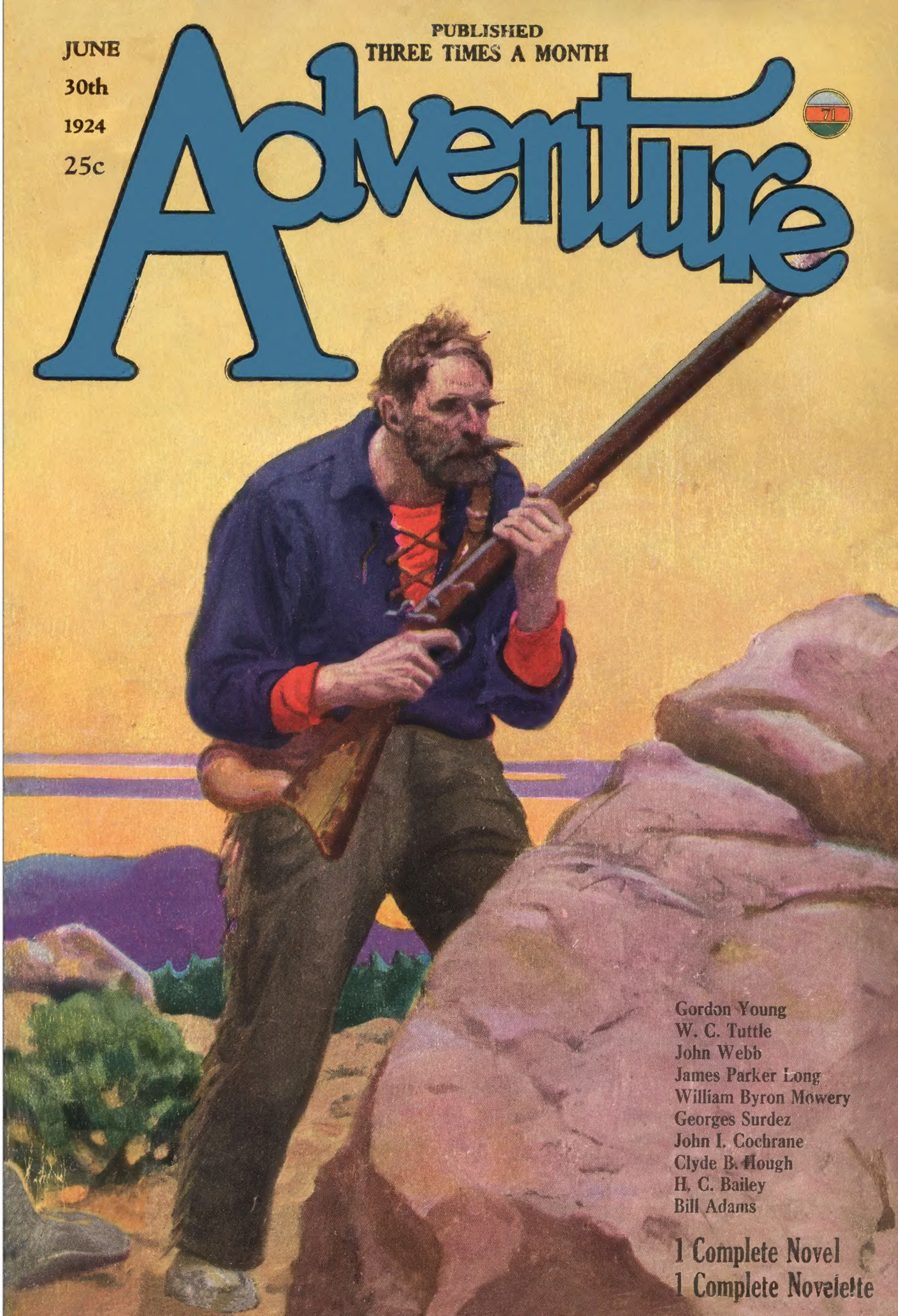
JUNE
30th
1924
25c

PUBLISHED
THREE TIMES A MONTH

Adventure



Gordon Young
W. C. Tuttle
John Webb
James Parker Long
William Byron Mowery
Georges Surdez
John I. Cochrane
Clyde B. Hough
H. C. Bailey
Bill Adams

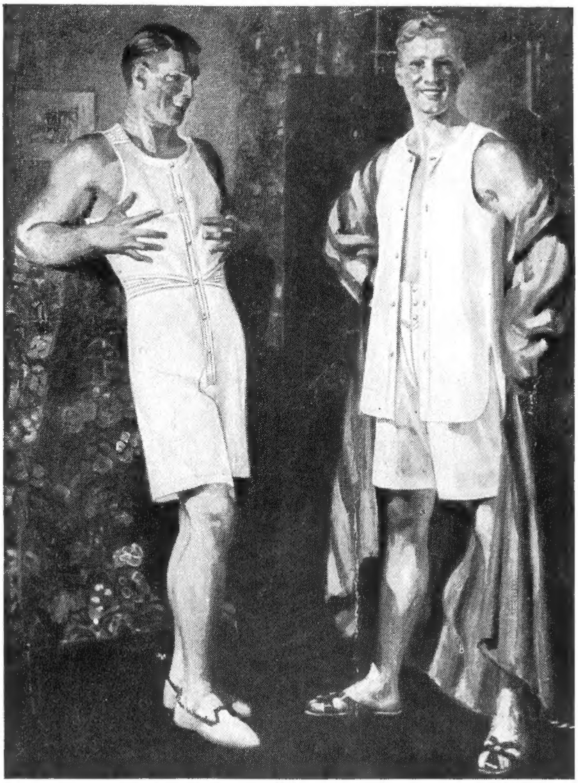
1 Complete Novel
1 Complete Novelette

JUNE 30th ISSUE, 1924
VOL. XLVII No. 3

ADVENTURE

25 Cents

"Next to myself I like 'B.V.D.' best"



For its cool comfort, long wear, and famous fit, "B.V.D." is *everywhere* the underwear of men who demand these unvarying qualities in their undergarments

There Is Only One "B. V. D." Underwear
It Is Always Identified By This Red Woven Label

MADE FOR THE
B.V.D.
BEST RETAIL TRADE

(*Trade Mark Reg. U.S. Pat. Off. and Foreign Countries*)

No underwear is "B.V.D."
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Sole Makers of "B.V.D." Underwear

"B.V.D."
Union Suit
(Patented Features)
Men's $1.50 the suit
Youths' 85c

"B.V.D."
Shirts and Drawers
85c the garment

Men's "B.V.D." Underwear
in Fancy Materials at
Various Prices

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The B.V.D. Co., Inc.

825

The Quickest Breakfast

QUICK QUAKER

Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes

Are you one of the wives or mothers who know you *should* serve oats often, but don't because of limited cooking time?

Quaker Oats experts have perfected a new Quaker Oats—Quick Quaker. So your grocer now has two styles of Quaker Oats.

Quick Quaker cooks perfectly in half the time of coffee. Takes scarcely longer than simple toasted bread.

So start the day now with a hot breakfast—with Quaker Oats, the premier vigor breakfast of the world, steaming, flavory and enticing.

Quick Quaker is flaked from the same queen oats as regular Quaker Oats. The only difference is that the grains are cut before flaking, rolled very thin and partly cooked. And these small flakes cook faster.

That rich Quaker flavor is there. All the good of hot breakfasts *quick*.

2 KINDS NOW

Ask for the kind of Quaker you prefer—Quick Quaker, or regular Quaker Oats. But be sure you get Quaker. Look for the picture of the Quaker on the package.

Quick Quaker

Cooks in 3 to 5 minutes

QUICK
QUAKER
OATS

Quaker Oats

The kind you have always known

ADVENTURE
June 30th, 1924

Published three times a month by The Ridgway Company at Spring and Macdougal Sts., New York, N. Y. Yearly subscription $6.00 in advance; single copy 25 cents. Entered as second-class matter Oct. 1, 1910, at the post-office at New York, N. Y., under the act of March 3, 1879.

Volume 47
Number 3

Sunshine or Shadow?

LUCKY boys and girls—graduating this month! Born lucky because God gave them fathers and mothers who have the love, the courage and the financial ability to see that their children are properly educated.

It is hard to believe that any father could care so little about the future of his children that he would let them give up school and go to work too soon if he could possibly prevent it.

And yet, right here in the United States where children are supposed to be better cared for than anywhere else in the world, there are more than 1,000,000 children between the ages of 10 and 16 at work—many of them laboring at health-wrecking and mind-dwarfing drudgery in factories, mines, shops and mills, on farms and in cities!

* * * *

All of the experts on health and education agree that children should be kept in school until they are at least 14. Every right-minded man and woman will agree on that point. Whether or not some children between 14 and 16 should drop all study and go to work is a grave question. But no one will deny that all of these youngsters need hours for play while they are growing—for the right play helps to build strong, healthy bodies. Now what are the facts? Here they are, furnished by the United States Census Bureau:

> 378,063 children between the ages of 10 and 14 are at work.
>
> 682,795 children between the ages of 14 and 16 are at work.

Remember, the Census figures show only those children reported by fathers and mothers. Investigators know that there are thousands of children from 4 to 10 years old whose work at home is hidden from the Census takers. No one can know the exact number.

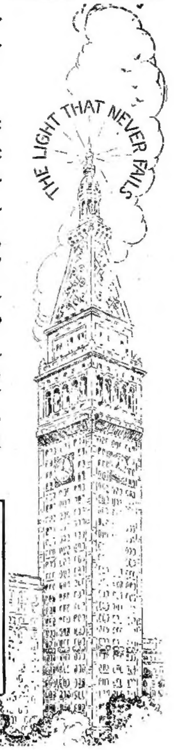
All through these bright sunshiny days when the beautiful green world is calling boys and girls to come and play—they drudge—perhaps a half million of them—mere children.

* * * *

Poor little souls, many of them doomed to live in the shadow of poverty and ignorance all their lives—what chance have they?

The number of children who are injured at work is appalling but not surprising. Children must play and when denied their rightful opportunities, they will play at their work and get hurt.

Most of us like to look on the sunny side of life—and so we should. But while we are planning for the happiness and welfare of our own boys and girls, can't we give just a few minutes' thought to the little toilers condemned to misery unless we help? Thousands of them can be developed into splendid men and women—if they are rescued now. Bring them out of the shadow and into the sunshine.


THE LIGHT THAT NEVER FAILS

Generally speaking—the states that give their children no protection or next to none have the greatest number of illiterates. They pay the price of their exploitation. Child labor in the United States has grown to alarming figures and will continue to grow until public opinion and humanity order it stopped. And apparently the only thing that can stop it everywhere and at once is the Child Labor Amendment to the Federal Constitution.

The time is coming when every state will be called upon to ratify the Amendment. Be ready to do your part to have it sanctioned by the Legislature of your state. It is a measure that should have your heartiest support.

HALEY FISKE, *President.*

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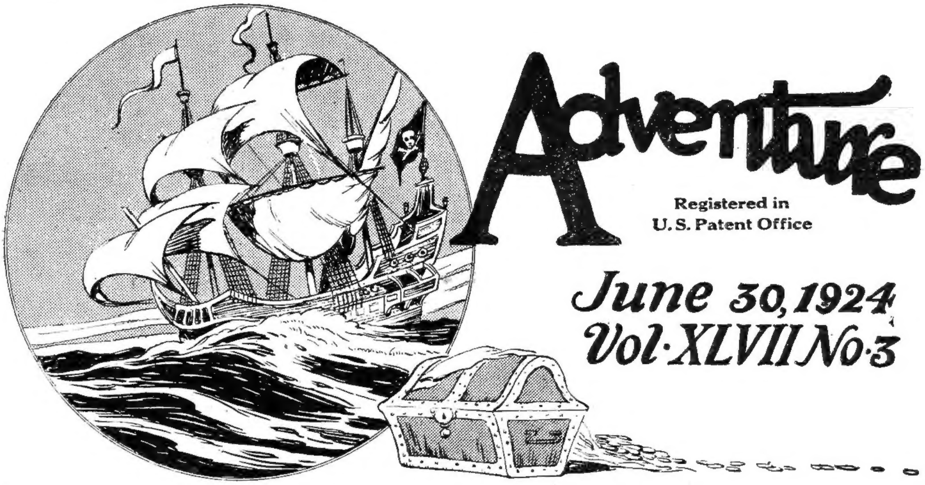

Adventure

Registered in
U. S. Patent Office

June 30, 1924
Vol. XLVII No. 3

Published Three Times a Month by THE RIDGWAY COMPANY

J. H. GANNON, President
C. H. HOLMES, Secretary and Treasurer

Spring and Macdougal Streets - - New York, N. Y.
6, Henrietta St., Covent Garden, London, W. C., England

Entered as Second-Class Matter, October 1, 1910, at the Post-Office at New York, N. Y., under the Act of March 3, 1879.

ARTHUR SULLIVANT HOFFMAN, Editor

Yearly Subscription, $6.00 in Advance
Single Copy, Twenty-Five Cents

Foreign Postage, $3.00 additional. Canadian Postage, 90 cents.

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The editor assumes no risk for manuscripts and illustrations submitted to this magazine, but he will use all due care while they are in his hands.

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**Occasionally one of our stories will be called an "Off-the-Trail" story, a warning that it is in some way different from the usual magazine stories, perhaps a little different, perhaps a good deal. It may violate a canon of literature or a custom of magazines, or merely be different from the type usually found in this magazine. The difference may lie in unusual theme, material, ending, or manner of telling. No question of relative merit is involved.*

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A free question and answer service bureau of information on outdoor life and activities everywhere. Comprising sixty-three geographical sub-divisions, with special sections on Radio, Mining and Prospecting, Weapons Past and Present, Salt and Fresh Water Fishing, Tropical Forestry, Aviation, Army Matters, United States and Foreign; and American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal.

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Cover Design . . . . **Frank C. Herbst**

Three Complete Novelettes

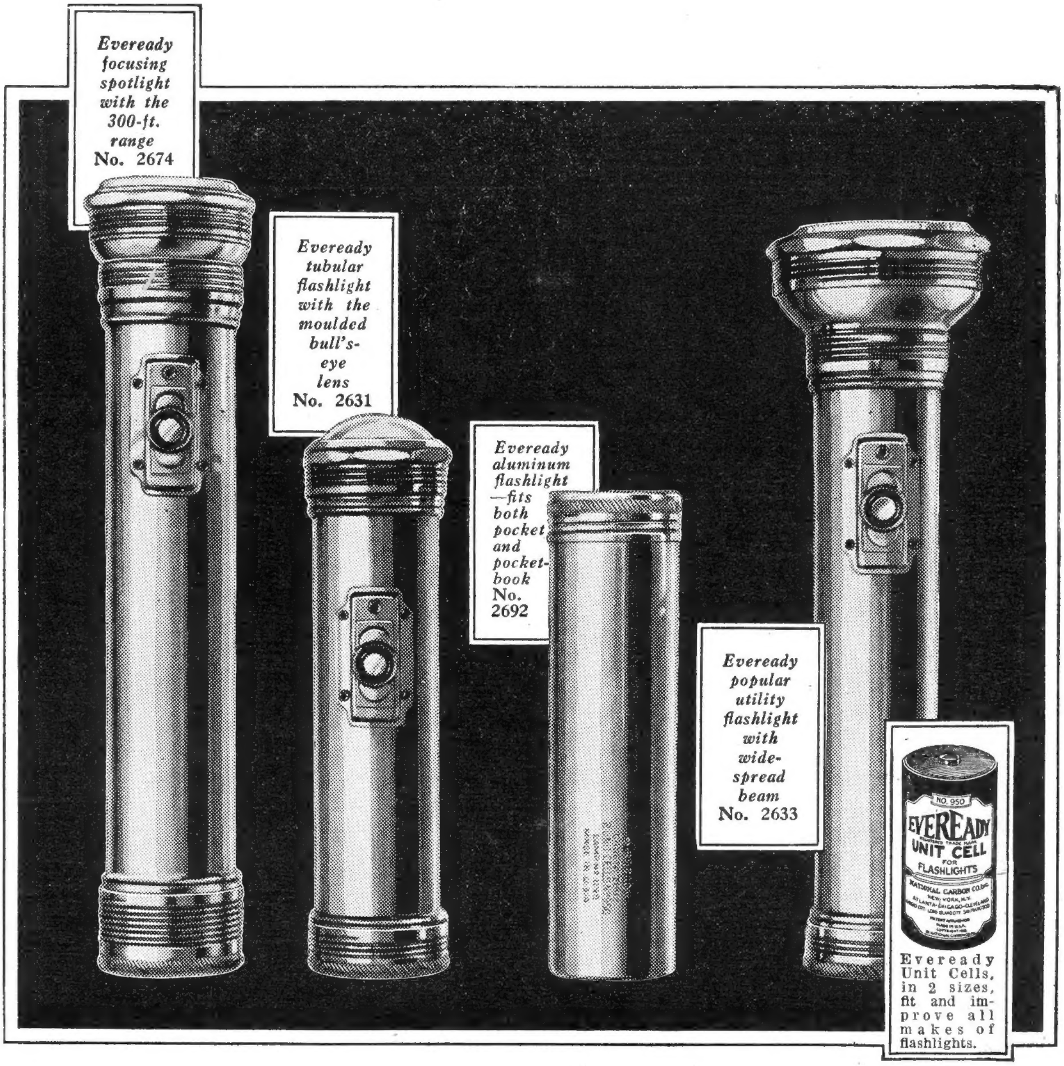
ALONE of all living men today, *Mamu the Soothsayer* knows the source of the uncountable golden treasure of the ancient Peruvian empire; and he is sworn before the Lord Sun to keep the secret as a sacred trust. So when a party of whites come to loot that treasure they have *Mamu*, and *Mamu* only, to reckon with. "THE INCA'S RANSOM," a novelette of the Andes by Gordon MacCreagh, complete in the next issue.

THERE were two factions after *Walt Green's* yacht, the *Wild Flower*—the gobs of Fog Rock Station and the two strangers. And it looked as if the two strangers had an oar in first. Then "*Blackie*," commanding officer of the gobs as well as their agent, stepped in—with both fists. "THE GUNNER'S BIG CRUISE," a complete novelette, by Charles Victor Fischer, in the next issue.

MOHAMED ALI'S cloak of protection usually shielded his followers. But when *Mamun* braved danger for him, there was the possibility that he might be caught beyond the confines of *Mohamed Ali's* cloak. "THE ADVENTURE OF THE THIRD SCRIBE," a complete novelette, by George E. Holt, in the next issue.

Other stories in the next issue are forecast on the last page of this one.

Adventure **is out on the 10th, 20th and 30th of each month**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CAN BE BANISHED

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If you knew Paul Johnson, you would ask the same question, "How does *he* do it?"

For Johnson makes only a modest salary—still he dresses better, has a better home, with more comforts and luxuries than other men. Yet it isn't because he economizes—if anything, he spends more freely than his friends.

Needless to say, Johnson has no Aladdin's lamp. But he has what every man has—spare time. And all Johnson has done to earn $5 to $20 *extra* every week is devote a few spare hours to sending us the new and renewal orders to ADVENTURE, EVERYBODY'S, THE DELINEATOR and THE DESIGNER, from his community.

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It will cost you only the postage to get full particulars. The coupon below insures you the same helpful cooperation that has made hundreds of men independent. Clip it out and mail it—*now!*

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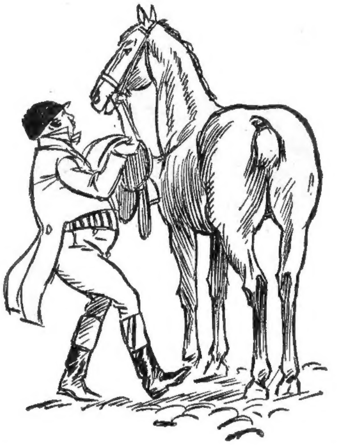

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"Can't you see it, Bob? Don't you see that the reason men get ahead is because they train themselves to do some one thing just a little better than others?

"If the International Correspondence Schools can raise the salaries of other men, they can raise yours. If they can help other men to win advancement and more money, they can help you, too. I am sure of it.

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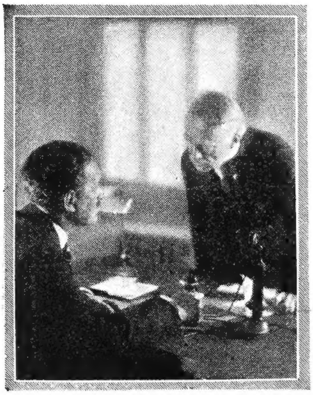
"I am 62 years of age, and looked like 80—a fitter subject for the Old People's Home than an active, outside insurance solicitor. Constipation had been the bane of my life. My feet could hardly carry me along, and my conversational powers were exhausted during business hours. About 12 months ago I was recommended as a last resort to try Fleischmann's Yeast. I can hardly believe it, neither can my associates—that I am the same man of a year ago. 'You look and act like a man of forty,' say my friends today."
(A letter from Mr. Russell Carolan of St. Louis, Mo.)



"Five years ago as an office worker in Milwaukee, I could answer to the description of the 'run-down, nervous, suffering woman' in the patent medicine ads. My sallow complexion was my greatest worry and I was always troubled with constipation. I had taken medicine for four years, but the doctor said that drugs could not effect a permanent cure. Two years ago I learned from the girls in the office to eat Fleischmann's Yeast. Today I am frequently complimented on my fresh complexion."
(Extract from a letter of Mrs. Ella Fitzgerald of Ypsilanti, Michigan)

"A physical wreck—I was irritable, nervous, debilitated. I tried nearly every curative treatment known to science, but to no avail. I was simply depleted of nervous energy. When I heard of Fleischmann's Yeast I was skeptical of the wonderful results attributed to it. In a week's time, after using the yeast, my digestion became better, my complexion brighter, and I slowly regained lost vitality. Is it any wonder that I am a convert to the curative qualities of Fleischmann's Yeast?"
(Mr. Clair C. Cook, of Los Angeles, California)

You may not realize its amazing power

—*Put this familiar food to work for you*

These remarkable reports are typical of thousands of similar tributes to Fleischmann's Yeast.

There is nothing mysterious about its action. It is not a "cure-all," not a medicine in any sense. But when the body is choked with the poisons of constipation—or when its vitality is low so that skin, stomach, and general health are affected—this simple, natural food achieves literally amazing results.

Concentrated in every cake of Fleischmann's Yeast are millions of tiny yeast-plants, alive and active. At once they go to work—invigorating the whole system, clearing the skin, aiding digestion, strengthening the intestinal muscles and making them healthy and active. *Health* is yours once more.

Dissolve one cake in a glass of water (just hot enough to drink)

EAT
FLEISCHMANN'S
YEAST
FOR
HEALTH

—before breakfast and at bedtime. Fleischmann's Yeast, when taken this way, is especially effective in overcoming or preventing constipation.

Or eat 2 or 3 cakes a day—spread on bread or crackers—dissolved in fruit juices or milk—or eat it plain.

Fleischmann's Yeast comes only in the tinfoil package—it cannot be purchased in tablet form. *All grocers have it.* Start eating it today! A few days' supply will keep fresh in *your* ice box as well as in the grocer's. Write us for further information or let us send you a free copy of our latest booklet on Yeast for Health. Address: Health Research Dept. Z-5, The Fleischmann Company, 701 Washington Street, New York.

Adventure

June 30
1924
Vol. XLVII
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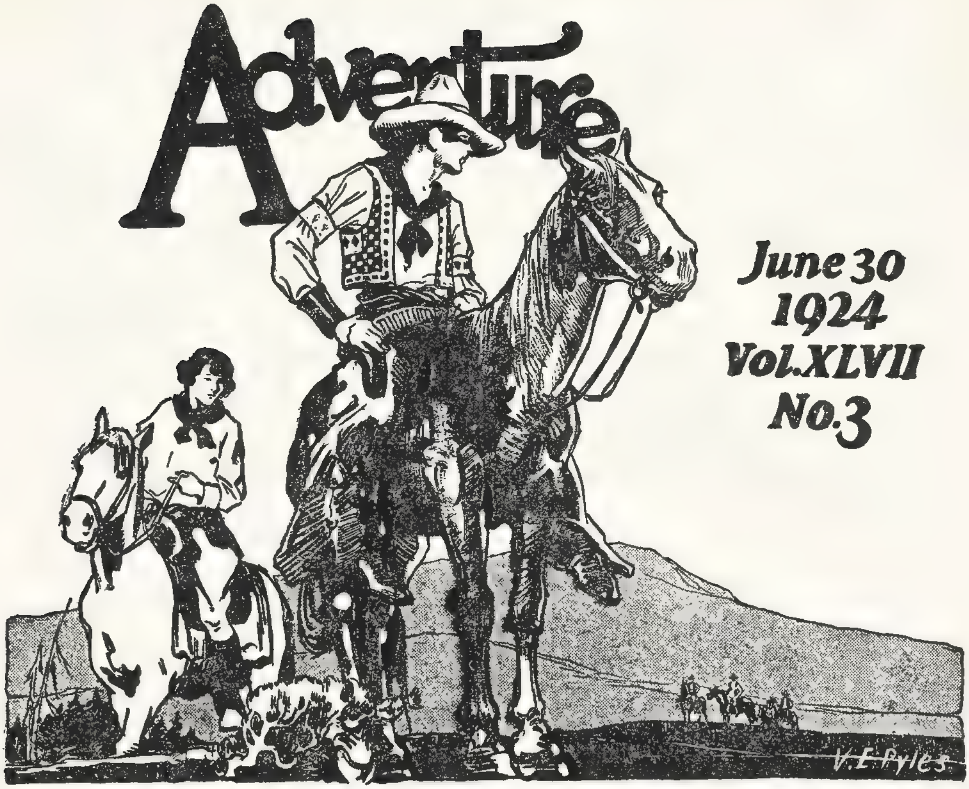

OUT OF THE FLOOD

A Complete Novel—by W. C. Tuttle

Author of "Rustler's Roost," "The Medicine Man," etc.

ON THE rim of a mesa stood a tall roan horse, its rider slouched wearily in the saddle. Below and to the right, about a half-mile away, was the San Miguel River, running almost bank-full with the yellow Spring flood.

To the left stretched the rolling hills of the San Miguel Range; a broken sweep of hills that faded into the hazy distance; uncrossed by fence, an ideal cattleland. Far to the left stretched the yellow ribbon of road, which led from Range City to the T-Anchor-Bar cattle-ranch.

The rider lifted his head and looked down this road, where a cloud of dust betokened the coming of some sort of an equipage. And this rider, Rex Denayer, was worth more than a passing glance as he removed his sombrero and shook his curly head in the breeze.

At first glance one might declare—"A pretty girl in male attire."

And Rex Denayer was "pretty." Some twist of an unkind fate had made him beautiful. His face was oval, his nose perfect in shape, slightly tilted; his mouth a perfect cupid-bow and his eyes long-lashed and so blue that they were almost a violet tint.

His head was small and covered with thick, curling brown hair. He was of medium height, slim-waisted, straight as a young sapling, with the seemingly delicate hands of a girl. His garb was typical of the range-land, almost somber in color, from the black muffler around his throat to the high-heeled boots on his small feet.

He had been christened Rex by old

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"Dynamite" Denayer, a big, roaring-voiced, he- man of cowland; owner of the T-Anchor-Bar and a fortune in cattle. Rex's mother had died while he was still an infant. And Dynamite Denayer, watching the development of his son and heir, gloomily wondered at an unkind fate that took away his good wife and left him to guide the destinies of a pretty son.

But the name of Rex did not remain after the boy was old enough to ride the ranges. With an utter disregard for his own life, or for the lives of others; defiant of law and order, he became "Rowdy" Denayer.

Dynamite sent him to college; the college sent him back to Dynamite almost by return train. A professor, with a lisp, called Rowdy's attention to something, and woke up in a hospital. Rowdy thought the professor was mocking him for his looks.

An old master of the squared circle, who had drifted into cowland, took a liking to Rowdy and taught him the rudiments of self-defense. Rowdy had been an apt pupil. The six-shooter was one of Rowdy's early playthings and he had acquired an uncanny skill in its use.

But with all his fights, accidents and drunken falls, his face remained unmarked. Only his big eyes showed the trace of dissipation; eyes that were gloomy, somber, as he watched the dust-cloud grow closer to the mesa rim.

"Slim Lorimer's havin' trouble with that gray team," he told the roan. "Probably got somebody with him and is showin' off."

The dust clouds blew away in a cross wind, showing the gray team, buckboard and two people on the seat. The team had stopped and appeared to be backing up, ramping the front wheels badly. Suddenly they lurched ahead, breaking into a gallop, with the buckboard bounding and careening over the rough road behind them.

"Yeah, that's Slim," observed Rowdy, softly sarcastic, although there was a bit of a smile in his gloomy eyes as the running team swung past the mesa and headed for the river.

Rowdy caught the flash of color as they passed, and peered more intently at the dust-cloud.

"Slim's got a lady with him. Huh!"

Rowdy rubbed his chin and squinted thoughtfully.

"And the darned fool is goin' to give her a duckin', if he don't look out."

The running team was already close to the river, which had swollen considerable during the day, and the driver seemed to be making no effort to check their speed. Rowdy spurred his horse into action, almost jumping it off the mesa rim, and headed down through the mesquite toward the road.

And Slim Lorimer knew that they were just about due to splash into the San Miguel; but there was nothing he could do. He braced his boot-heels solidly and looked sidewise at the girl beside him who was hanging on with both hands, a look of frightened bewilderment on her face.

Slim still held about five feet of thin, badly-worn leather strap in his hands; the remnant of one of the lines. The other line was conspicuous by its absence. Slim turned to the girl.

"River's ahead!" he yelled, although his face did not change expression. Slim was very homely, very lanky. His eyebrows grew high above his wistful gray eyes, giving him an expression of continuous astonishment.

The girl did not reply. It is barely possible that she did not understand the meaning of his warning yell. She knew that the driver had been urging the horses at top speed and that when he tried to check them, one of the lines had broken.

The sudden pull on the other line had thrown the horses off the road; but it too had snapped under the strain, leaving them helpless. The road was not surfaced for speed, and at times all four wheels of the buckboard were off the ground.

"Ought to be Sat'day night!" yelled Slim seriously.

The girl wondered what connection there could be between Saturday night and the runaway. The next moment, the buckboard careened down through a gravelly cut and the entire equipage shot out into the yellow flood waters of the river.

A sheet of water spurted up from the breasts of the horses; the sudden shock almost threw the girl from her seat, and the next instant they were slowly turning around and around in the flood, with both horses floundering wildly and trying to gain a footing.

The girl was still clinging to the seat, saying nothing. Slim glanced at her, as he climbed over the dashboard and stepped out on to the tongue. The horses were fighting frantically to save their own lives now. At times they would both go under, come up snorting, pawing the water.

Slim managed to straddle one of them and began turning them toward the center of the flood gain, just as Rowdy swung in along the bank, shaking out his lariat.

"Let 'em come out on this side, Slim!" he yelled.

Slim glanced at him, shook his head and continued his efforts.

"It's shorter this way!" yelled Rowdy.

Slim straightened up disgustedly and replied:

"——, we jist come from that side!"

And continued to urge them toward the opposite bank.

They were drifting far below the ford now. Rowdy raced back up the river a few yards and rode into the water. The roan was a good swimmer, and in a few moments was far enough across to get a footing.

Swiftly Rowdy worked his way down to where he could cast his lariat to Slim, who dropped it over the head of the almost-exhausted horses. Then Rowdy turned the tall roan and literally dragged the team and buckboard out of the flood.

But the dragging was not without incident. The river-bank was covered with big boulders, and the buckboard did not belie its name. The girl, thankful that all danger was over, had relaxed her grip on the seat; and the next moment she was flung bodily into the river, when the wheels on the opposite side of the equipage rose up over a three-foot obstruction.

Rowdy flung off his rope, whirled past the buckboard and back into the water. The girl had been entirely immersed, but now she staggered back to her feet, waist-deep in water, while Rowdy slid into the water beside her and took her arm.

"How do yuh feel?" he asked.

"Uh—uh—all right, thank you," she faltered.

"All right, let's wade out; whatcha say?"

Solemnly Rowdy piloted her out of the river and up to the buckboard, where he helped her back on to the seat. She looked like a very wet kitten, as she sat there, water running down off the end of her nose.

"Lines busted," explained Slim to Rowdy.

"Showin' off, wasn't yuh—to begin with?" asked Rowdy.

"Showin'——? Huh!" Slim appeared shocked to think that any one would accuse him of such a thing.

"You ask Miss Holton if I was showin' off."

Rowdy turned and looked at the girl. He had heard of Molly Holton many times. She had been a chum of Clare Denayer, Rowdy's sister, at college. He remembered hearing some one mention the fact that Molly Holton was coming to make Clare a visit.

"You ain't met her yet, have yuh?" queried Slim. "Gimme yore lariat to make lines out of, and I'll introduce yuh."

"I do not think an introduction is necessary," said Molly shiveringly, but with a smile. "I feel that I know Mr. Denayer. I knew just how he would look."

"Oh!"

Rowdy looked straight at her for a moment before he turned and went straight to his horse, which he mounted and rode away toward the T-Anchor-Bar.

Slim stared after him for a moment, squinted at Molly Holton and went on fashioning a pair of lines from Rowdy's rope.

"What was the matter with him?" she asked wonderingly.

Slim climbed over the wheel and sat down beside her. The gray team jerked into their collars and yanked the buckboard back on to the road. But they had lost all desire to run away, and only broke into a fast trot.

"Rowdy's a queer jigger," explained Slim. "He's kinda touchy about his looks, and you kinda pricked him, when yuh said yuh knowed just how he'd look."

"But I said nothing against his looks," protested the girl, hanging on with both hands to the lurching seat.

"Clara told me all about him. She had his picture, and I only said I knew how he would look."

"Thassall right," grinned Slim. "Dontcha worry none about Rowdy. He's plumb sensitive about his face, ma'am. But, if he keeps on ——in' around, some body'll change the shape of it.

"Sure is hard for a feller to go around lookin' like a girl. Drinkin' whisky don't faze his complexion, and he's so danged handy with his fists that nobody around here has ever punched him in the face."

"But he is not at all effeminate," observed Molly.

Slim squinted through the dust and shook his head.

"No, ma'am. Rowdy's a whole lot like a gold-plated iron dollar."

"In what way, Mr. Lorimer?"

"Kinda shiny outside, but hard as —— inside. Say, this here dust ain't doin' a thing to yore looks, ma'am. Haw, haw! I betcha we both look like a pair of mud babies."

"Do I look as funny as you do?" she laughed.

"I dunno how I stack up, but yore looks is almost makin' me hysterical. We're darned near to the ranch now," as they drove slowly up a grade.

"We can see her from the top of the hill, ma'am."

The T-Anchor-Bar ranch-house was a one-story, rambling adobe structure; picturesque in its setting, typical of the old Southwest Mission days. It was located on a wide flat, at the mouth of a little valley, and had an unobstructed view in three directions.

Behind the ranch-house were the long, low adobe barns, sheds, bunk-house and corrals, shaded by live-oaks. In the center of the *patio* grew a clump of enormous oaks that shaded the whole quadrangle.

The T-Anchor-Bar was the largest cattle-ranch in the San Miguel Range, and by far the richest. Old Dynamite Denayer knew cattle. He was a square shooter, always ready to help his neighbor; a man who had fought for what he owned—and ready to fight to hold it.

Just now, Dynamite Denayer and "Limpy" Overton, the sheriff, had walked down to the corral where Rowdy was unsaddling his roan. Rowdy nodded to the sheriff, slapped the loose horse on the rump and turned to his father inquiringly.

"Mind tellin' us about your trouble with Buck Zaney?" asked his father.

"Buck Zaney, eh?"

Rowdy's eyes narrowed slightly and he turned to the sheriff.

"Has Buck turned his troubles over to the law?"

The sheriff shifted uneasily.

"No-o-o, I wouldn't say that, Rowdy. I'm not out here to make any arrests; but I'd kinda like to know. Yuh see, we ain't concerned, except where the other man didn't have an even break."

"Did Buck say that?" asked Rowdy.

"Buck never said nothin'. Some of them that seen it——"

"Oh, yeah!" There was a world of sarcasm in Rowdy's voice.

"Take it easy, son," advised his father. "Tell us about it."

"All right. I went into Buck's saloon yesterday, and I was mindin' my own business. You know that me and Buck don't hitch at all, but we've never locked horns.

"There were some of the dance-hall girls foolin' around the place, and Buck's got an idea that they're all stuck on him. A couple of 'em hooks on to me in front of the bar, and I seen Buck lookin' at us. Then he winks at one of the boys and comes over near us. Then he says to the bartender—

" 'If these girls want a drink, make 'em pay for it.' "

Rowdy's face went white over the recital and his eyes snapped venomously.

"Then I proceeded to pistol-whip the dirty coyote."

Dynamite squinted off across the hills and his eyes slowly turned to the sheriff.

"Was Buck hurt much, Limpy?" he asked.

"Twelve stitches in his scalp, thasall."

Rowdy turned and started away with his saddle, but his father stopped him.

"Rowdy, you've got to curb your temper. Every time you go to town you get into trouble. It will lead to somethin' serious before you get through."

"Well?" Rowdy did not look at his father, but waited for the verdict, which came thusly:

"From now on, you get forty dollars a month—not a cent more. You can throw that away on whisky and roulette, but it won't last long enough for you to raise a lot of ——"

Rowdy turned and squinted at his father, his lips drawn into a thin line. Then he laughed and went on to the shed, where he hung his saddle.

Dynamite Denayer turned back to the house, as Slim Lorimer whirled the gray team to a stop at the front door. Rowdy watched the meeting between Clare and Molly, and saw Clare introduce his father and the sheriff.

Slim drove the team down to the corral, but Rowdy made no move to help him unhitch the team. Rowdy was not exactly mad, but he was hurt.

"Forty a month," he reflected bitterly. "The pay of an ordinary cowpuncher."

And he owed quite a sum of money to

Buck Zaney, owner of the Trail saloon and gambling-house, and to "Smiling" Smith, who owned the El Camino Real gambling-house. He was thinking how long it would be before he could pay these debts with forty dollars a month, when Slim joined him.

"Well, I got the princess to the ranch," grinned Slim. "She looked like an idol made of mud; all wet and travelin' in the dust thatway. But she's reg'lar folks, and laughed at everythin'."

"Yeah—at everythin'," said Rowdy meaningly.

"Aw, shucks; she wasn't makin' fun of you, Rowdy. I had to explain why yuh busted out thataway. She's plumb sorry she spoke. Clare showed her yore pitcher, and she knowed how yuh look."

Rowdy lighted a cigaret and remained silent.

"Whatsa sheriff doin' out here?" asked Slim.

"Buck Zaney's got twelve stitches in his head."

"Well," said Slim slowly, "that's all he's got in his head then. Somebody told me about yuh pettin' him over the head with a six-gun. Twelve stitches, eh? Gosh, yuh must 'a' shore caressed him real sentimental-like."

TWO other cowpunchers rode in and dismounted wearily. One was as thin as a bed-slat, long-armed, bow-legged, and with a long, sad face and buck teeth. He was "Arizony" Allen, the prize pessimist of the San Miguel Range.

The other, an undersized individual, with a huge nose and a mop of tow-colored hair, was christened Ephraim Elijah Deal. But this had been shortened to the unlovely title of "Dirty." Both Arizony Allen and Dirty Deal were employed by the T-Anchor-Bar, and were known as top-hands.

"Whodja bring out from town, Slim?" asked Dirty, as they came over, half-dragging their saddles.

"Miss Molly Holton," said Slim.

"Oh, yeah; Clare's friend, eh? Good looker?"

"Jist the most promisin' lookin' filly yuh ever seen."

"By golly!" Dirty grinned widely and rubbed his stubbled chin. "Gotta shave and dude up a little, I reckon."

"Aw-w-w ——!" grunted Arizony wearily. "Whatsa use of dudin' up? You don't think she'd pay any 'tention to a common, ordinary puncher, do yuh?"

"Ain't we as good as anybody?" demanded Dirty.

"Well, whatsa use, anyway? We're all right, 's far 's that goes, I reckon. But you can't support a woman on forty a month."

"I don't aim to be a puncher all my life," retorted Dirty. "I've got ambitions, I have."

"Whatsa use of havin' ambitions?"

"You don't mind if I have 'em, do yuh, Arizony?"

"Go ahead," grunted Arizony gloomily, "but don't feel bad if they ain't noways realized in this world, Dirty. That's the trouble with this world."

Arizony leaned back against the shed and slowly lighted a cigaret.

"There ain't room for only a favored few. Ambition never put 'em where they are. Nossir—it was luck. Fortune-teller gimme the dope on my future. Said f'r me to jist take things as they come and to look out for a dark man."

"Didja?" asked Slim interestedly.

"Yeah," drawled Arizony. "It was down in Texas. They calls it 'Takes-us' down there. The dark man was a tall nigger with a knife. I shore busted him with a .45. I says to m'self—

" 'There's the dark man accounted fer.'

"The fortune-teller also told me to take things as they come; so I took a horse and high-tailed it for the tall spots. It shore worked out jist like he said; but what good did it do?"

"He must 'a' been a misfortune-teller, Arizony," observed Rowdy.

"By golly, that's about all there is in life, Rowdy. If yore a cowpunch—what's ahead of yuh? Jist another buckin' bronc, some —— fool cows that have got a wrong idea of the right way to go, three meals per day and forty dollars per month."

"That's why I'm ambitious," grinned Dirty, starting for the bunk-house, "and the first one there will be the best one dressed for supper."

"You let my Prince Albert coat alone," warned Arizony, in a high-pitched voice.

"That moth-eaten old wreck?" laughed Dirty. "I'd jist as soon wear a blanket."

"It would be a lot safer," snorted Arizony, starting after Dirty to see that his clothes were not borrowed.

Rowdy squinted after them and grinned at Slim.

"Who'd ever think that them two were the coldest blooded gun-packers in the country, Slim? They'll both be tryin' to make a hit with that new girl. Dirty will wear his old brown derby, while Arizony will drape himself in that old Prince Albert coat, spill cologne all over each other, and think they're the height of fashion."

"Arizony's got a pair of white flannel pants, too," grinned Slim. "He bought 'em from a travelin' man. They're about a foot too big around the waist, but Slim don't mind. He had 'em on the other day, and he tucked 'em around his waist and pulled his belt tight.

"He said he paid twenty-five dollars for 'em. They're nice cloth, but they sure don't beautify Arizony to any great extent. I thought he was paradin' around in his drawers."

Rowdy laughed and they sat down in the shade. Clare and Molly were crossing the *patio*, looking at the place. Clare was auburn-haired, tall and slender, and looked enough like Rowdy to be mistaken for a twin, although she was two years older than he.

"I seen Agnes Pattee in town today," said Slim. "Her and old Cale. She was ridin' a bucker, and y'betcha she shore can ride. Bronc gets kinda salty right in the middle of the street and she shore took him out of it. And she told that hawse all about himself, too."

Rowdy smiled. The Pattee family were outcasts in the San Miguel Range country. Cale Pattee owned the Bar 66 ranch, located to the west of the T-Anchor-Bar; a tumble-down lot of ranch buildings and a few hundred nondescript cattle.

Pattee employed one cowboy, "Spanish" Bowman; and did the rest of the work himself, with the able assistance of his daughter, Agnes. There was a Mrs. Pattee, a middle-aged, slatternly woman, who smoked a cob-pipe.

Agnes was just past twenty, with red hair and freckled face. She was not pretty, but she was capable. She dressed like a cowboy, swore like one—and did not care who heard her. No one in the San Miguel Range had ever seen her in female garb.

Old Cale Pattee was a small man, red of beard and hair, vitriolic of tongue and belligerent to a degree that no one cared to associate with him or his family—except Rowdy Denayer.

"I came past there today," said Rowdy, "and the old lady said they had gone to town."

"I allus feel kinda sorry for them folks," observed Slim, digging his heel in the soft dirt. "They don't get much out of life. That girl never has no girl to visit, nor nothin'.

"Old Pattee is so danged or'nary that he picks a scrap ever' chance he gets, and that girl swears somethin' awful. But just the same I can't help feelin' sorry for folks that nobody wants to mix with, don't you, Rowdy?"

"Yeap." Rowdy spoke absently.

Clare and Molly were crossing the *patio* again, coming toward them. He got to his feet and waited for them to come up.

"You did not wait long enough for me to thank you for helping me out of the river," said Molly, smiling and holding out her hand.

Rowdy did not appear to see her hand. He hooked his thumbs over his belt and looked down at the ground.

"Thassall right," he muttered. "I don't reckon you'd have drowned, anyway. Yuh don't need to thank me."

And then he turned abruptly and went toward the bunk-house. Molly's face went crimson and she turned back toward the ranch-house. She was not in the habit of being snubbed.

"Oh, Molly; I'm so sorry," said Clare softly, as she hurried after Molly and threw an arm around her. "I don't know what is the matter with Rowdy. He is getting unbearable."

"It doesn't matter," Molly laughed, but without mirth. "I suppose it is my fault. But he misunderstood me down at the river."

"Well, he can go to grass!" declared Clare hotly. "I'll never speak to him until he apologizes to you."

Slim Lorimer shook his head and looked after the two girls. For a long time Slim had worshiped at the shrine of Clare Denayer; worshiped silently and from afar; knowing that she would never be more than a friend to him.

As he got to his feet and started for the bunk-house, Smiling Smith, owner of the El Camino Real, rode in and waved him a greeting. Smith was a big man, smooth of face, wearing a perpetual grin. He was not a typical gambler, and might be mistaken for a prosperous merchant.

"Hello, Slim," he called, as he slid ponderously off his horse. "How's tricks?"

"Pretty fair, Smilin'," grinned Slim. "Ridin' f'r exercise?"

Smiling slapped the dust off his hat and wiped out the sweat-band with his handkerchief.

"Well—partly, I reckon," looking around. "Is Rowdy here?"

"Yeah, he's in the bunk-house, I reckon. Want him?"

"Uh-huh. Nothin' special, but——"

"I'll send him out," offered Slim.

He strode down to the door and called to Rowdy, who came out.

"Smilin' Smith wouldst talk with thee," said Slim.

Rowdy squinted at Smiling for a moment, nodded and went out to him. Slim went into the bunk-house and closed the door.

"What's on yore mind, Smilin'?" asked Rowdy easily.

"About eight hundred dollars, Rowdy," softly. "You——"

"Smilin', you promised me yuh wouldn't come here to the ranch to collect that," reminded Rowdy, half-angrily.

"I know I did," Smiling mopped his damp brow. "You also promised to pay it a week ago, Rowdy. Mebbe we both broke our word."

"I owe yuh eight hundred?"

"Exactly."

"How are yuh goin' to get it, Smilin'?"

"How?"

Smiling stopped mopping his brow and stared at Rowdy.

"Yeah," Rowdy grinned. "The old man cut off my money today. Says he's goin' to pay me forty a month from now on."

"Oh-ho! So that's the deal, eh? Well, I reckon Dynamite Denayer is good for eight hundred dollars, Rowdy."

"I'm of age, Smilin'; and you agreed to never tell him a thing about this."

Rowdy was not pleading. His tone was coldly conversational and his eyes never wavered from Smiling's face.

"I kept my word," declared Smiling. "You promised to pay me, Rowdy. I'm not jumpin' on yuh, kid. You can't pay me on your forty a month. Where do I get off?"

Rowdy shook his head.

"I dunno, Smilin'."

"You owe money to Buck Zaney, too."

"Oh, is that so?" Rowdy laughed bitterly. "I suppose he told yuh this, didn't he?"

"What if he did, Rowdy. You owe him more than yuh do me; and he's goin' to collect from your dad."

"Is he?"

Rowdy shut his lips tight and stared at the toes of his boots.

"Said he was—as soon as he's able."

"Well—" Rowdy took a deep breath and looked at Smiling—"you can see how I'm fixed. I've spent a lot of money with you and Buck. I admit that I owe yuh both a lot of money. Give me two weeks and I'll pay it back—to both of yuh."

"Two weeks, eh?"

Smiling squinted thoughtfully at Rowdy. "Pay us both in two weeks, eh?"

"In two weeks."

"Well, that's fair enough for me. I dunno how Buck will feel about it. He swore he was goin' to your dad just as soon as he was able to come out here."

"All right, let him come, if he wants to. Next time I'll not fan him with a gun, Smilin'. He'll wait two weeks, or he'll never enjoy what he collects from Dynamite Denayer."

"I'll tell him" agreed Smiling, as he mounted his horse. "Two weeks from today, Rowdy. S'-long."

Rowdy watched him ride away, and a whimsical smile twisted his lips.

"Eighteen hundred dollars in two weeks," he muttered. "My salary will be about twenty dollars. I'm seven kinds of —— fool; but anythin' can happen in two weeks. My goose is well-cooked, if dad ever finds that I've run up a gamblin' bill.

"He told me that he'd never stand for a thing like that, and he never says anythin' he don't back up to the letter. If he finds out about it—good-by to my chance of ever owning a stick or a stone of the T-Anchor-Bar. But where in —— can I get eighteen hundred dollars in two weeks?"

Rowdy shook his head wonderingly and went to the bunk-house to change his clothes.

SMILING SMITH rode slowly back to town and went to the Trail saloon, where he found Buck Zaney, his head swathed in bandages.

The Trail was a pretentious place for a town as small as Range City. It boasted a first-class honkatonk show—which it did not have—a complete array of gambling apparatus and a bar long enough to accommodate fifty men at a time.

Buck employed about twenty dance-hall girls and possibly a dozen gamblers. Range City was the only town in the San Miguel Range and drew its patronage from the wide places. The railroad had never come to Range City, but the stage-line gave fairly good service to the railroad at Ronan, thirty miles away.

Buck Zaney was typical of his profession. Buck's nose and ears gave mute evidence that Buck had been a prize-fighter in his youth. His eyes were close-set under beetling brows and his mouth and lower jaw were a trifle undershot. His hair was slightly grizzled and close-cropped; his body rather squat, but powerful.

Buck wore the loudest clothes he could find, and his cucumber-like fingers sparkled with big, yellow diamonds.

He left a roulette game to join Smiling Smith at the bar, and after their drink he waited for Smith to talk.

"I seen him," offered Smith. "He'll pay in two weeks."

"The —— he will!" growled Buck throatily, shaking his head. "He'll pay me when I ask for it."

"All right."

Smiling was indifferent, and turned away, but Buck stopped him.

"Why don't he pay now, Smith?"

"Ain't got it, Buck. Old Dynamite got sore over the way Rowdy's been actin', and he's cut him down to forty a month."

"The —— he has! Then—" Buck laughed crookedly—"how is he goin' to ever pay us—out of his salary?"

"I dunno, Buck. He said he'd have it in two weeks, and I'm goin' to wait; *sabe?*"

"All right, you wait, if yuh want to. I'm goin' after mine."

Smiling came closer to Buck and lowered his voice.

"Rowdy sent yuh a message, Buck. He said to tell yuh that you'd never enjoy the money that you get from Dynamite."

"Eh? What'd he mean by that, Smith?"

"Pick your own answer, Buck. I'd wait, if I was you."

Buck's hand went up and he felt of the bandages on his head. Every time he felt of those bandages his teeth shut tight in anger, and his hands itched for a chance to come to grips with that girl-faced young man, who had battered him down with a pistol-barrel.

"You must think I'm afraid of him," he growled.

"I'm not doin' any of the thinkin'," said Smiling seriously. "He sent the message, thassall."

"Why do you advise me to wait, Smith?"

"Because I think it's safer. Rowdy Denayer looks like a lily; but he's poison-ivy, Buck. That son-of-a-gun is just too fast with a gun, that's all. And when you talk about fist-fightin'—that's him."

"Aw, ——!" scornfully. "One punch and he's o-u-t."

"All right," grinned Smiling. "You won't be the first —— fool to think the same thing."

Smiling walked out of the place, leaving Buck leaning against the bar, scowling at himself in the mirror. His head still ached from the pounding it had received, and the knitting of the torn scalp felt like electric needles.

"Forty a month and offers to pay eighteen hundred in two weeks. He's a —— liar!"

"Whatcha say, Mr. Zaney?" asked the bartender.

"None of your —— business!" snapped Buck.

He had spoken aloud without thinking. As he turned and walked back to the roulette layout the bartender shook his head and muttered—

"Scalpin' don't help to make 'em pleasant, that's a cinch; and when they starts talkin' to themselves—blooie."

* * *

IT WAS a week later and great activity prevailed at the T-Anchor-Bar ranch-house. Grandma and Grandpa Bowden, parents of the deceased Mrs. Denayer, were to celebrate their golden wedding.

It was early in the evening, before the arrival of any of the guests. Slim Lorimer and Dirty Deal were arguing over the placing of the living-room furniture.

"Don't move the table, I tell yuh," ordered Slim. "Let her alone."

"Yuh gotta move somethin'," complained Dirty. "We said we'd clean up this here room, and it won't look like we've done anythin', if we don't do a little shiftin'."

"Ne'mind shiftin' anythin'. This here room looks great. We're goin' to dance in the dinin'-room, anyway. This here is only kinda receptive. When they comes in we'll send 'em up-stairs to lay off their wraps, de-posit their kids, et cettery."

The fiddler, a wizened little man, with a walrus mustache, came in from the dining-room, carrying his fiddle.

"Where's the wax?" he demanded. "Yuh gotta have wax for that floor, Slim."

"Arizony went after it, Ed," replied Slim, looking at his watch. "He ain't no more'n got to town by this time. Anyway, we won't be dancin' for quite a while."

"Arizony, eh?"

The fiddler scratched his head.

"Well, I dunno whether we'll ever git it or not. He'll likely come back and say that he decided the floor was slick enough."

"Betcha five dollars he'll bring some, Ed," offered Dirty. "Betcha five to one."

"You've done made a bet with me," grinned the fiddler, producing the dollar. "Let Slim hold stakes."

Slim accepted the money, and the fiddler went back to the dining-room, playing a jerky little tune on his instrument.

"By golly, I hope Arizony don't slip up on that present thing," said Slim. "It was a danged shame we didn't think about it before, Dirty."

At the last moment Slim had remembered that it was customary to give a gold present at a golden wedding. He and Arizony and Dirty had put in seven dollars apiece and had sent Arizony post-haste to Range City to make the purchase.

There was one chance in a dozen that they might find a suitable gift. In one corner of the only drugstore was a little jewelry shop, but the stock was limited. Arizony had no idea of the fitness of things; but he was as capable as either Slim or Dirty of making the purchase.

"Well," observed Dirty, "I dunno what Arizony'll get for twenty-one dollars, but it'll be a humdinger, y'betcha."

"Yeah, he'll get somethin', that's a cinch," agreed Slim, peering out of the window.

"Here comes Uncle Johnny Marsh and Aunt Lizzie. My gosh, Uncle Johnny's got on a hard hat!"

A moment later the door opened and in came John Marsh and his wife. Uncle Johnny, as he was familiarly known, owned a small cattle-ranch south of Range City, and he and his wife were universally loved the length and breadth of the San Miguel Range.

"Hello, folks," greeted Slim, as he and Dirty shook hands with both of them.

"Hello, dudes," laughed Uncle Johnny, looking them over. "By grab, you punchers look like it was Sunday."

"They just look fine," said Aunt Lizzie. "I wanted Johnny to wear his Prince Albert, but he wouldn't do it. I reckon he's savin' it to be laid out in."

"No such a darned thing," denied Uncle Johnny. "It's ripped plumb up the back."

"That's all right," laughed his wife. "You'll be settin' ag'in the wall most of the evenin', talkin' cows, and it wouldn't show."

"Nossir, I ain't. By golly, I came here to shake a hoof. Ain't danced for a long time, and I'm kinda honin' to tromp a lot to music."

Clare came down the stairs and greeted the new arrivals, just as the Shively family arrived. Hozie Shively stopped in the doorway and executed a heavy-footed jig-step before advancing to the middle of the room, where a laughing welcome awaited him and his wife.

Both Shively and his wife were past middle-age, but they never overlooked an opportunity to dance and make merry.

"Long time I no see yuh, folks," panted Shively, who was just a trifle too fleshy for sudden exertion. "We sure hurried along to be here on time."

"We thought we'd be here first," explained Mrs. Shively, "but that man of mine couldn't find his necktie and had to hunt all over the ranch to find it. That makes seven times he's lost that same tie in three years."

"Ma, that ain't so," protested Hozie. "I told yuh a dozen times that 'Sleepy' Jones was wearin' it. Feller can't have nothin' new around that place."

Clare piloted Aunt Lizzie and Mrs. Shively up-stairs to put away their wraps, and Slim drew Uncle Johnny aside.

"Uncle Johnny, have yuh still got religion?" he asked.

Uncle Johnny got religion every time a revivalist came to the San Miguel Range—and lost it as soon as he left.

He squinted closely at Slim and moved in closer.

"What kind of religion, Slim?" he half-whispered.

"Temp'rance."

"Hm-m-m!" Uncle Johnny squinted thoughtfully and shook his head.

"Not too rabid," he whispered. "Whatcha want to know for?"

Slim jerked his head toward the dining-room door, and they made their exit in a body.

"I dunno about me," said Shively dubiously, but accepting a glass. "Ma's got the nose of a bird-dog, and she made me promise to never get drunk ag'in."

"Nose of a bird-dog?" queried Uncle Johnny. "Aunt Lizzie can smell liquor from here to San Francisco ag'in the wind. But golden weddin's don't come every year. Here's hopin' yore rope never tangles, gents."

"Don'tcha let that preacher smell yore breath, Uncle Johnny," warned Slim. "He'll be here pretty soon."

"That old pelican?"

Johnny's chest expanded under the shock of strong liquor, and he pointed at the jug.

"Is that all yuh got, Slim?"

"Well, that's a big part of it, Uncle Johnny."

"Then I won't let Reverend Wheaton whiff my breath. There ain't no more than enough for those present."

"Where's Rowdy?" asked Shively.

"Rowdy?" Slim shook his head. "Prob'ly in town. He ain't been home since yesterday."

Uncle Johnny shook his head sadly.

"Dang it all, I wish Rowdy'd straighten up. He's got a fine home here and everythin' he wants; but all he does is drink and look for trouble. What's wrong with him?"

"His face," said Dirty seriously. "He's tryin' to be somethin' that he ain't. He's a he-man, Rowdy is. But he don't look like one; so he gets salty as the —— to prove that he is, thassall."

"Two won't make me smell worse than one," observed Hozie Shively; which showed that he was little interested in Rowdy Denayer's troubles.

A moment later Dynamite Denayer came in and shook hands with the guests, and the voices of the women came from the living-room.

"My gosh, we better sneak in kinda offhanded-like," said Uncle Johnny nervously.

"Better have another," suggested Dirty.

"Well," dubiously. "I dunno. P'raps it wouldn't hurt."

They drank a toast to Grandma and Grandpa Bowden, and then Hozie reminded Uncle Johnny that they were to sneak in offhanded-like.

"Who—me?" demanded Uncle Johnny. "Me sneak in? By —— man, I never sneak. I'm John Marsh, owner of the best dog-goned cattle-ranch in the San Miguel. Sneak, ——! Gimme a brass band to let 'em know I'm comin'."

"Somebody comin'," warned Slim, as fresh voices showed the arrival of more guests.

"That's the Bowden family and the preacher. Hang on to yore breaths, gents."

They advanced in a body into the living-room and joined in the greetings. The Bowdens were nearing the eighty mark, and the Reverend Wheaton, who had married them fifty years previous, was just past that age.

The old minister was a tall, thin, bony-faced old man, but with a springy step and a keen eye in spite of his age. He shook hands solemnly with every one, except Uncle Johnny. There was a look of inquiry on the minister's face, as he said softly—

"John, you can only hold your breath a certain length of time."

Uncle Johnny grinned confusedly, but nodded and breathed heavily.

"Wine is a mocker," quoted the minister softly.

"This ain't wine," grinned Uncle Johnny. "Don't let anybody see yuh follerin' me, and I'll take yuh to it."

"But, John——" The minister started to protest.

"You danged hypocrite," chuckled Uncle Johnny. "C'mon."

The rest of the crowd were too busy with the Bowden family to pay any attention to Uncle Johnny and the minister, who eased softly into the dining-room. Molly Holden was introduced around, and even Grandpa Bowden asked her to dance with him.

"I ain't too old," he assured her. "By jing, I can swing m' pardner as well as any cowpuncher yuh ever seen, young lady."

Dirty had gone over to close the front door, but stopped and peered out for a moment. He came back to Slim and drew him aside.

"Rowdy just rode in," he said softly, "and I think he's drunk. Mebbe we better go down to the bunk-house and see if he's fit to join us."

"Good idea," nodded Slim, and they went out through the dining-room and kitchen.

They found Rowdy at the barn, trying to unsaddle his horse. There was no denying that Rowdy was under the influence of liquor. They helped him unsaddle and went to the bunk-house with him.

"Where yuh been, Rowdy?" asked Slim, after Rowdy had sat down on the edge of a bunk, staring into space.

"Who wants to know?" growled Rowdy, without lifting his eyes.

"We was jist wonderin', Rowdy."

"Thasso?" Rowdy thought it all over for several moments, and then. "What day is this, anyway?"

"Thursday."

"Thursday? The —— it is! I thought it was Wednesday."

"You left here yesterday," reminded Slim.

"Did I?" indifferently. He half-smiled, but he seemed to remember and looked up quickly.

"Say, ain't that party tonight?"

"Y'betcha," nodded Dirty. "It's on right now, Rowdy."

"——! I'm sorry about that."

Rowdy got to his feet and began taking off his clothes.

"You goin' to change and clean up?" asked Slim.

"Yeah, sure I am. I'm all right, Slim."

"That's shore fine," said Slim. "You clean up good and nobody'll know you've been drinkin'."

"Who cares a ——?" Quickly.

"Well," said Slim softly, "mebbe I do, Rowdy."

"You do?" Rowdy gripped a bunk-post with one hand and dangled his shirt in the other, as he squinted at Slim.

"You care about me, Slim? Huh!"

Rowdy sat down on the edge of the bunk and stared at the floor.

"C'mon, Dirty," said Slim. "Give him room to clean up."

As they opened the door to go out, Rowdy looked up at Slim.

"All right, Slim; I'll do the best I can," he said.

"That's shore fine, Rowdy," replied Slim. "You can make it, cowboy."

More guests were unloading in front of the ranch-house, and as Slim and Dirty came up to the lights from the windows they saw that Cale Pattee and Agnes were among them.

"Now, who in the —— invited them two?" demanded Slim of Dirty.

"Don't ask me," grunted Dirty, as they went around the house and came in through the kitchen.

A hush had fallen upon the crowd in the living-room, as they recognized the Pattees; but the minister broke the spell by crossing the room to them and holding out his hand.

"Welcome to our party," said the minister jovially.

Cale Pattee shook hands with him, but his eyes searched the group all the while. He knew he was not welcome here. Agnes was dressed in a new gray dress, and seemed ill at ease in it. She looked defiantly at Clare and Molly, who had made no move to welcome her.

Across the room, near the fireplace, was an open window, the curtain flopping in the night breeze. The door opened behind Pattee and Arizony Allen strode in, carrying a huge bundle in his arms. He was dressed in his faded, ill-fitting old Prince Albert coat and his long legs were encased in white flannels, which were tucked into the tops of his boots.

He stared around at the crowd and headed for the table.

"By golly, he got it!" whooped Slim joyously. "Good for you, Arizony!"

"Yeah, I shore got it; but I had a awful time," replied Arizony. "I hunted all——"

"Where's the wax for the floor?" interrupted the fiddler anxiously. "Forgot that, didn't yuh?"

"I got her, too," grinned Arizony, producing a package from the tail-pocket of his coat and handing it to the fiddler.

"Gimme that fiddler's dollar, Slim," chortled Dirty. "I knowed I was bettin' on a cinch."

Slim produced the wager and handed it to Dirty.

"Ho-hold on!" snorted the fiddler, tearing the rest of the paper off the package. "I win the bet, Dirty. Look what he brought!"

He held out the contents on his palm for all to see.

"Beeswax!" snorted the fiddler. "Beeswax! Who ever heard of greasin' a dance floor with beeswax, I ask yuh?"

"You said yuh wanted wax," declared Arizony belligerently. "That's wax, ain't it?"

"Yeah," disgustedly, "it's wax—beeswax. Yuh can't make a floor slick with beeswax."

"I bet on wax," said Dirty slowly. "I didn't say what kind of wax, when I made my bet."

Uncle Johnny began laughing hysterically and the minister slapped him warningly on the back.

"Well," said Arizony meaningly. "I don't reckon we need the floor too slick."

He started back toward the table, but stopped.

"Say, I heard some news before I left town. The Ronan stage was held up this afternoon and the driver was killed, so they say. 'Cordin' to what I can hear, there was a lot of money on that stage for the San Miguel bank. Nobody knows how much."

"Where did it happen?" asked Dynamite Denayer.

"I dunno. Somebody said it was down near Piute Creek; but they was all excited. The sheriff and several others are down thataway now, I reckon."

"Yeah, and they'll probably get away," observed Denayer. "I've wondered that somebody didn't try it."

"Very unfortunate, indeed," proclaimed the minister. "In the midst of life we are in death, as it were. But there is nothing we can do; so let us go ahead with the party.

"I would suggest, before the dance starts, to perform, as nearly as possible, the wedding of fifty years ago."

This idea seemed to meet with instant favor; especially with Uncle Johnny.

"Lemme be best man," he urged. "I'm the best dog-gone——"

"John Marsh, you hush up!" snapped Aunt Lizzie. "You better set down and remain calm."

"I think the plan is just fine," declared Clare. "Wait until I get a veil for grandma. Brides always have a veil."

As she raced up the stairs, Rowdy came in the front door. He had changed clothes, washed hurriedly, and there was little indication that he had been drinking. He looked over the crowd, grinned slightly at their greeting and crossed over to Cale Pattee.

Dynamite Denayer was watching him closely; wondering where he had been, what he had been doing. But Rowdy did not look at his father. Clare was coming down the stairs, carrying the flowing veil, which she pinned to Grandma Bowden's white hair.

"Arizony, you've got to make the presentation speech," said Slim.

"Me?" Arizony indicated himself with a forefinger.

"Y'betcha. Me and Dirty never could do it."

"Well, my gosh, I don't know what to say, Slim."

"Shore yuh do. Jist take the present——"

"Now listen," protested Arizony. "I've done all the work. I hunted all over the danged town for that present. I betcha nobody knows how hard they was to find. And I had to pay seven dollars apiece for 'em, too."

"Didja buy three presents?"

"Well, they wouldn't bust the set, Slim."

"Thassall right," said Dirty. "You step right up and howdedo to 'em, Arizony. Go ahead before they start the services."

"Aw-w-w, gosh!" wailed Arizony helplessly. "I've allus got to do the dirty work."

"Yo're dressed for it," explained Slim. "Me and Dirty look like —— beside you. Betcha you could get elected governor in that outfit."

"Huh!"

Arizony crossed to the table and picked up the big bundle awkwardly, carefully.

"Gee cripes, he must 'a' bought the golden calf!" grunted Dirty.

"Three of 'em," said Slim.

"Three golden calves, Slim?"

Slim did not answer. Arizony turned and walked over to the old couple. No one seemed to be paying any attention to Arizony, as they were busy arranging details. Uncle Johnny was still arguing in favor of himself and Aunt Lizzie was trying to make him be quiet. Molly Holton seemed to be enjoying the whole affair hugely, and was helping Clare to decorate the old lady.

Rowdy's eyes were somber and his thoughts seemed far away from the wedding. Arizony cleared his throat raspingly.

"Know all men by these presents—" he began.

"My gosh, this ain't no location notice!" exploded Dirty.

Arizony turned his head and glared at Dirty.

"You bat-eared Piute!" he snorted. "Mebbe you can do this better than I can."

"Arizony, you are just doing fine," said Aunt Lizzie.

"Yuh danged right I am," agreed Arizony. "And from now on I'm goin' to do jist as well.

"Feller citizens and ladies, I stand——"

"Aw, give it to 'em and shut up!" Dirty whooped. "You talk like a man runnin' for Sunday school sup'intendent. Give it to 'em and set down."

"Thasso?" Arizony turned and glared at Dirty. "I s'pose——"

CAME the scrape of footsteps across the porch, the door flew open and in came the sheriff, followed by a deputy. They stopped just inside the door, as if wondering at the crowd.

"What's the idea, Limpy?" asked Dynamite Denayer, coming toward him.

Limpy Overton, the sheriff, glanced quickly at Denayer and around the room.

"Stage held up today."

The sheriff spoke jerkily, as though under a strain.

"Driver killed—shot twice. Ten thousand in gold and currency gone."

"But why do you come here?" asked Denayer.

Overton's hand dropped to his gun and he moved slowly toward Cale Pattee.

"Don't move, Pattee," he said coldly.

"Whatcha mean?" Pattee's lips barely moved.

Overton laughed shortly.

"When you ripped open that mail-sack, yuh forgot to put your knife in your pocket. It's got your initials and the ranch brand cut into the handle. Unbuckle your belt."

Cale Pattee's hands went slowly to his belt-buckle, as if to comply with the sheriff's order, but at that moment Agnes Pattee stepped half in front of her father and faced the sheriff.

"You're a liar!" she snapped. "He never done it!"

"Look out!" snapped the sheriff.

Cale Pattee had whirled and dived head first out through the open window. It was done very quickly and the sheriff had no chance to use his gun without endangering others. He sprang after Pattee, but Rowdy half-fell into him and they went down in a heap.

And as they went down they crashed into Arizony, who was knocked loose from the floor and came down with a crash on top of his wedding present.

The deputy raced across the room, helped the sheriff to his feet and ran to the window, leaning far out. Came the sound of a galloping horse, as Cale Pattee rode away into the hills.

The sheriff was swearing and holding to Rowdy.

"What did yuh block me for?" he demanded hotly.

"I didn't block yuh," denied Rowdy. "I was tryin' to help yuh."

"Yeah, like —— you was. Dang you, yuh stepped right in front of me. I've got a notion——"

"Yuh better use it," said Rowdy evenly. "It's the first one yuh ever had."

The sheriff looked appealingly at Dynamite Denayer, but the big man only looked thoughtful.

"Well, he's got away," the sheriff spoke wearily. "He knows every inch of these hills and he'll be hard to take. Sorry to interrupt the party, Dynamite."

He and his deputy departed without a backward look or a good-by to anybody. Rowdy looked up to see his father's eyes upon him, and looked toward the door, where Agnes Pattee was just stepping outside. He started to follow her, but stopped.

"Say, what's all the water doin' on the floor?" asked Hozie Shively, pointing at a flooded spot around the broken package, which had been the wedding present.

They moved in closer and examined it. Dirty dropped on his knees and took the package apart, looking closely at a section of glass, which appeared to have been part of a globe. He got to his feet, holding a limp object in his hand.

"Gold-fish!" he blurted. "Look at it!"

"There was three of 'em," said Arizony blankly.

"Three of 'em?" queried Slim wonderingly.

"Uh-huh. I got 'em from Jimmy Adams."

"Fish for a weddin' present?" wondered Slim. "Why, Arizony, we told yuh what it was for and——"

"Well," said Arizony defensively, "they're gold, ain't they?"

Rowdy moved away from the crowd and went out on to the porch. His father watched him for a moment and followed him out. He put a hand on Rowdy's shoulder, and for several moments they stood looking out over the moonlit hills.

"Rowdy, why did you block the sheriff?"

Dynamite Denayer spoke softly, but his hand gripped Rowdy's shoulder a little tighter.

"I told the sheriff what I was tryin' to do," replied Rowdy evenly.

"I heard you tell him, Rowdy. He didn't believe you any more than I'm believin' you right now."

"All right."

"Where have you been since yesterday?" asked his father.

Rowdy laughed shortly, bitterly.

"I don't know."

"Too drunk to remember?"

"I s'pose."

"You suppose, do you?" Dynamite Denayer's voice grew hoarse with anger. "You've just about played out your string, Rowdy. You're gettin' a fine reputation as a drunken bum, and I won't stand for it any longer.

"I gave you plenty of money, and I suppose the fault is partly mine. Dance-hall girls and whisky! A gunman, eh? You've fought with everybody that looks sideways at you, and you've grown to have no respect for law and order. By —— that's all over now, young man.

"You shake yourself together and act like a man, or this ranch will no longer be a home to you. I won't stand for any more foolishness. One more bad break and you're through."

Dynamite Denayer turned and went back into the house, where the party had recovered from the excitement and were getting ready for the dance. Rowdy still leaned against the side of a porch-post, staring out into the night, when a figure in white came slowly around the corner of the porch and into the dim light from a window.

It was Molly Holton. Rowdy stared at her, as she came up close to him.

"I just had to get outside," she explained softly. "It was so exciting, so unusual that I felt the need of some cool night air to calm my nerves. I—I almost screamed."

"Thasso?" Rowdy smiled faintly.

"And to think that one of the guests was wanted for murder and robbery," she continued nervously. "He looks like he might have done a thing like that."

"Looks don't make murderers and robbers," said Rowdy.

"Oh, I know that; but he—he looks like—well, you know what I mean, Mr. Denayer."

"I reckon I know what you're drivin' at, Miss Holton. Now, if Cale Pattee was a handsome man, you wouldn't feel thataway, would yuh?"

"I hardly know what you mean," she replied.

"I'll tell yuh what I mean. You look at the outside, like lots of folks do. Now, take old Arizony's weddin' present, for instance. You seen 'em didn't yuh?"

"The gold-fish?" Molly laughed softly. "Yes, I have seen many gold-fish, Mr. Denayer."

"Kinda pretty, ain't they? All shiny, with colored tones and they're graceful as can be, ain't they?"

"Yes, they are very beautiful."

"Uh-huh, they sure are, Miss. But did yuh ever look under them gaudy scales?"

"Why—uh—certainly not."

"If yuh did," said Rowdy softly, "you'd find they are just plain fish, thassall."

Molly was silent for several moments and then turned to the door.

"I think I know what you mean," she said slowly, her hand on the door-knob, "and I would just like to remind you that the gold-fish, in spite of its beauty, gets along as peaceably as possible and does not attack the other fish, nor try to make them unhappy."

She opened the door and went inside, leaving Rowdy staring after her. He stared at the closed door for a while and mechanically rolled a cigaret. The fiddler was playing "When you and I were young, Maggie," and several voices began singing the chorus.

Rowdy went down the steps and down to the bunk-house. At the door he turned and looked back toward the house.

"In spite of its beauty, gets along as peaceably as possible," he muttered, quoting Molly's words, "Well, I ought to have as much sense as a gold-fish, but it seems that I haven't."

He started to go into the bunk-house, but changed his mind and went to the barn instead. He saddled his tall roan, led him through a small gate at the rear of the barn, swung into the saddle and rode across the hills toward the Bar-66 ranch.

AFTER the party that night, Slim Lorimer searched for Rowdy, but could not find him. Rowdy's horse and saddle were gone; so he saddled his horse, without saying a word to anyone, and rode to Range City. He felt that Rowdy had gone back to town to continue his dissipation.

There was a certain amount of excitement in town over the robbery and murder, and the sheriff was swearing in a posse to go after Cale Pattee early in the morning. He had already sworn in a dozen men. The stage-driver, Sam Kelly, had been well liked, and left a wife and two small children.

He had been shot twice, evidently with a six-shooter, and one of the shots, presumably the last, had been at close range.

Slim found that the amount stolen ranged all the way from ten thousand to ten million dollars; according to the condition of the one making the estimate.

Slim went from place to place, but was unable to find Rowdy Denayer. He questioned dance-hall girls, but none of them had seen him that evening. Bartenders shook their heads and disclaimed any knowledge of his whereabouts.

In the Trail saloon he found Buck Zaney, his head still bandaged, drinking with "Skee" Belton, an ex-cowpuncher, who had turned professional gambler. Belton was a saturnine sort of a person, with a long, bony face, high cheek-bones and a none-too-savory reputation.

"Seen anythin' of Rowdy Denayer?" asked Slim.

"Aw, to —— with him!" grunted Buck. "Have a drink."

Slim accepted the drink, but pursued his inquiries.

"Seen him lately, Buck?"

"Rowdy? No, and I don't care if I never do. He's too much on the prod to suit me. Didja hear about the murder and robbery?"

Slim nodded and asked them to accept of his hospitality. But Buck shoved Slim's money aside and ordered the bartender to fill up the glasses.

"Was you at the T-Anchor-Bar when Pattee got away?" asked Belton.

"Yeah, I was there," grinned Slim. "Old Cale's a slick one."

"Yeah—with a little help."

"Little help?" Slim simulated surprize. "Whatcha mean?"

"With the assistance of Rowdy Denayer."

"——, that's news to me," declared Slim. "I seen the whole thing."

Buck laughed and drained his glass.

"Well, mebbe that was the sheriff's alibi," he said. "Limpy told us that Rowdy blocked him, or he'd 'a' got Pattee cold."

"Aw, shucks! Rowdy was tryin' to catch Pattee and the sheriff fell over himself. I can prove it by everybody that was there."

"Yuh can, eh?"

Slim turned and faced Limpy Overton, who had come in behind them and had overheard the conversation. Limpy was mad and did not care who knew it. He knew he would have to make Slim retract that statement or become the laughing-stock of the range country.

"Well," drawled Slim, "I'll have to take that back, Limpy. There's two folks who didn't see it thataway."

"Who are they?" growled the sheriff.

"You and yore deputy."

"Is that so?" Limpy's teeth snapped ominously. "I suppose you're another friend of Cale Pattee."

"Not what you'd call a bosom friend," grinned Slim easily, but his face went hard as he noticed that the sheriff's right elbow was bent slightly and his open hand was near the butt of his holstered gun.

Buck and Bolton noticed this, too, and stepped out of line with the two men.

"You ain't aimin' to start a battle with me, are yuh?" asked Slim slowly. "'Cause if yuh are, Limpy—whop!"

The sheriff had interpreted Slim's words as an acceptance to his challenge, and went swiftly after his gun. But Slim threw himself into the sheriff, smothered his draw with both arms, and they crashed back into a poker table.

The sheriff's gun went spinning under the table, while the players arose up in wrath and told both of them what they thought, individually and collectively.

Slim released the sheriff, who was too mad to do anything but splutter curses and try to crawl under the table after his gun; but a husky cowpuncher from the Bar-66 put a ham-like hand against the sheriff's face and shoved him back to a sitting position on the bar-rail.

"'At's movin' 'em around," chuckled Buck Zaney. "If yuh don't think he looks decorative enough there—move him any old place."

The sheriff got to his feet, mouthing whispered threats, and went out of the door, walking stiff-legged.

"It's a great life," declared Slim, leaning back against the bar. "Hard luck seems to foller the sheriff t'day."

Buck laughed and turned to the bar with Skee Belton.

"Limpy sure is mad," he agreed. "I can't blame him, but the danged fool hadn't ought to have started to pull a gun on yuh, Slim—not at that range. He's prob'ly so sore about Pattee that he kinda lost his sense of distance."

"Just what has he got on Pattee?" asked Slim.

"Didn't yuh see it?" Buck drained his glass and turned to Slim.

"The jigger that done the job ripped open a mail-sack. I don't reckon he got anythin' out of the sack, but he dropped his knife in the road, along side of the sack. Mebbe it got kinda buried in the dust and he couldn't find it. Anyway, the sheriff found it. I seen the thing myself. It's a plain-handled pocket-knife, but on one side of it has been burned a letter C, a 66 and the letter P. I reckon the C. P. is for Cale Pattee and the 66 is his brand.

"It shore looks like a fool thing for a man to take a chance on losin' a thing like that; but it's the little things in life that hang men. Mebbe he never gave it a thought."

"How much money did he get?" asked Slim.

"Nobody knows just how much. Limpy says it's around ten thousand."

"And Sam Kelly was shot twice, eh?"

"Uh-huh."

"Who found it out first?"

"Amos Skelton. He was comin' to town and found the team all tangled up in the brush at Piute Creek. He tied the team behind his wagon and brought the outfit in. Sam was in the seat when he found him; which proved that the team didn't go far. The sheriff found where it had been pulled off—just on the South side of the crossin'."

"Do yuh reckon they'll git Cale Pattee?" Thus Skee Belton, who had kept out of the conversation. Skee was short on conversation at all times.

"Well," laughed Buck, "the sheriff is takin' an army with him. Old Pattee is a danged good shot. He might as well fade out of the country or take his medicine fightin'; cause no cow-land jury would ever give him a look-in."

"Might as well," grunted Skee.

"But if he ain't guilty, what chance has he got?" queried Slim.

"Jury chance," smiled Buck, after a moment's consideration.

Slim shook his head.

"And that's about the same chance a wax dog has in chasin' an asbestos cat through——"

"Just about. But there ain't much chance that he's innocent."

SLIM hung around town until daylight and rode away with the sheriff's posse. The sheriff did not speak to Slim, but some of the posse grinned and winked at Slim. They had heard of what had happened—and they liked Slim.

The sheriff led the way toward the Bar-66, riding well in the lead and sitting straight in the saddle. The posse was only equipped for a one-day trip, and none of them entertained a hope of finding Pattee at his own ranch; but it was as good as any place to start from.

About a mile from the Bar-66, a horseman rounded a turn, coming toward them. It was Rowdy Denayer on his tall roan. The sheriff drew up and the posse rode up around him. Slim rode slightly past them and waited for Rowdy to come up.

Rowdy did not hesitate at sight of them and only drew rein when within reach of the sheriff.

"Looks like a picnic party, but I don't see no lunchbox," observed Rowdy, looking around.

"Does eh?" growled the sheriff. "Well, it ain't."

"All right," grinned Rowdy, "what is it? I'll bite."

"You'll bite, eh?"

The sheriff rubbed the palm of his right hand on his thigh.

"If yore hand itches, it's a sign yo're goin' to get somethin'," informed Rowdy, easing himself in the saddle, but keeping his eyes on the sheriff's face.

Slim read the warning signs in Rowdy's face, and he knew that Rowdy was intentionally goading the sheriff, whose nerves were already on edge.

"Yo're after Cale Pattee, ain't yuh sheriff?" asked Slim.

The sheriff turned his head and glared at Slim.

"You're —— right I am!" he snapped.

"Well, this ain't him," Slim pointed at Rowdy. "This is Rowdy Denayer."

One of the posse laughed and the rest of them smiled widely. And without another word the sheriff turned past Rowdy and led his posse on toward the Bar-66.

Rowdy and Slim watched them disappear in a cloud of dust, before turning to each other. Slim was rolling a cigaret and handed the makings to Rowdy. Then they left the road and headed across the hills toward the T-Anchor-Bar.

"They won't find him at the Bar-66, will they?" asked Slim.

Rowdy shook his head and looked back.

"They don't expect to, do they, Slim?"

"Limpy Overton is mad enough to expect anythin', Rowdy. He's mad at everybody."

"He sure loves me," smiled Rowdy.

Slim told him what happened in the Trail saloon, and Rowdy grinned with glee.

"He told everybody that you kept him from capturing Cale Pattee last night," informed Slim. "Now he'll say that you helped him hide out from the posse."

"If he had as much brain as he has tongue, he'd be President of the United States," grinned Rowdy.

"Well, I dunno," said Slim seriously. "I don't like Limpy very well; but mebbe he's right, at that. If Pattee pulled that job, I'm sorry he got away, Rowdy. Sam Kelly was shot twice, and he leaves a family.

"Him makin' a getaway like that kinda makes it look like he was guilty. If they get him, he ain't got a chance. Likely the law won't even have a chance to work on him."

Rowdy turned and looked squarely at Slim, his face set in hard lines. No one would call him "pretty" now.

"Would they lynch him, Slim?" he asked.

"Higher'n ——," nodded Slim.

"Whether he's guilty or not?"

"Prob'ly. That's the way human bein's does things, Rowdy."

They rode on to the ranch and stabled their horses. Dirty Deal and Arizony were just getting out of bed, oozing pessimism by the yard—especially Arizony.

Slim went alone to the kitchen, where he found Dynamite Denayer. The owner of the ranch nodded to Slim and shoved back from the breakfast table.

"I was wonderin' where you and Rowdy went last night," he said.

"Town," said Slim shortly.

Dynamite studied the tall cowpuncher for a while, and then:

"Much obliged, Slim. He'll listen to you."

Slim grinned innocently.

"Rowdy's all right. I *sabe* him."

Dynamite sighed and tucked some tobacco into his pipe.

"I wish I did, Slim; but he's got me beat. Why do you suppose he helped Cale Pattee last night?"

"Did he?" Slim seemed surprized at the question.

Dynamite puffed slowly, looking down at the table. Then he lifted his eyes and looked straight at Slim.

"He didn't deny it, when I said he did."

"That's the —— of it," Slim looked up at him. "He's a dutiful son, Dynamite; and won't dispute his father."

"Huh!"

Dynamite's pipe slipped from between his teeth, but he managed to grab it in mid-air. He brushed away the scattered tobacco and ashes, put the pipe in his pocket and walked back into the living-room.

Slim grinned after him. He liked old Dynamite, but he knew he had jolted the old man with that statement. In a few minutes Clare and Molly came into the dining-room, and Clare came straight to him.

"Slim, do you know where Rowdy went last night?" she asked.

"Sure, I do," grinned Slim. "We just got back a few minutes ago."

"Oh! You went with him, Slim?"

Slim laughed and shoved back from the table.

"You folks quit worryin' about Rowdy. Me and him got kinda upset last night, and we thought a ride might do us good."

Clare laughed shortly.

"I can imagine you getting upset over anything, Slim Lorimer. Have they found Cale Pattee yet?"

Slim shook his head.

"Ain't yuh cheerin' Limpy Overton a little soon, Clare? He'll be lucky to find Pattee this Summer."

"Well, he was certainly angry last night," said Molly. "I have never heard such language as he used."

"He can do better than that," grinned Slim. "He's got a lot of words you never heard. Did the party finish good?"

"Just fine," nodded Clare. "Uncle Johnny went away crying because they didn't choose him as best man, and I really believe that the minister had something stronger than coffee. Anyway, he started in reading Proverbs instead of the wedding ceremony. Aunt Lizzie fell down dancing and when Arizony tried to help her up he busted his coat all the way down the back."

"And some one sat down on Mr. Deal's hat," said Molly.

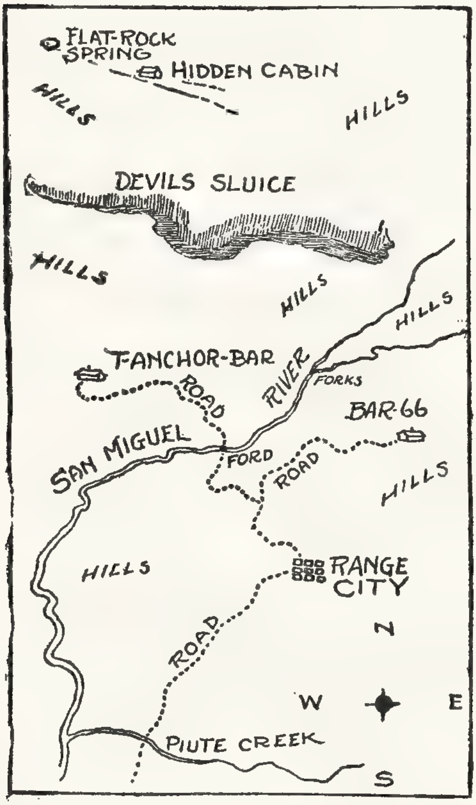
"That's right," laughed Clare. "It was just as flat as a plate. It made Dirty awful mad, but he didn't say a word. He went to the door and tried to see how far it would sail, I guess; but Hozie Shively was just coming in and it hit him right in the mouth. Dad had an awful time trying to keep them from having a fight right there."

"How about Arizony's wedding present?" grinned Slim.

"Oh, wasn't that the most ridiculous thing," gurgled Molly. "Just think of carrying that big bowl all the way from town on a horse, and then to smash it in such a way."

"And Rowdy invited the Pattees, didn't he, Slim?" asked Clare.

"I guess so," said Slim. "I never asked him. Agnes Pattee didn't look bad in a dress. If yuh fix her up she won't be so bad to look at. She's tougher'n a basket of snakes; but she ain't bad."



"Just sort of a wild girl?" asked Molly.

"Plumb wild," nodded Slim. "She's a top-hand buckaroo, she is; and she can swear like a mule-skinner. I betcha she'd fight at the drop of a hat—and drop it herself—but she ain't a bad girl. Old Pattee is a tough old rooster and the old lady ain't noways re-fined; so yuh can't expect too much from Agnes."

"I wonder what Rowdy finds to like about them," said Clare.

"I dunno," said Slim, "but I've got an idea that they don't object to him lookin' like a girl."

"Do other people?" asked Molly quickly.

"He thinks they do," said Slim slowly. "Some of 'em has. He's got to the point where he hates himself, and when a feller gets to hatin' himself good and strong he ain't passin' out a lot of love to other folks. If you try to be nice to him, he gets the idea that yuh feel sorry for him."

"Well, what can one do?" queried Molly.

"Let him fight it out alone, I reckon."

"If he would only fight alone," said Clare thoughtfully.

"By golly, it's gettin' too deep for me," grinned Slim, picking up his hat. "I'm glad I'm plumb homely t' look at."

He grinned and went out through the kitchen. Molly looked thoughtfully at Clare and smiled.

"I never cared for homely men, Clare; but I could almost love that tall, inquisitive-eyed cowboy."

"I don't think that Slim would care to be 'almost' loved, Molly."

"No," said Molly smiling, "he is worth more than that."

"He's a good old Slim," agreed Clare warmly. "Why he has been here so long that we assess him as personal property."

"And what salary does he command, Clare?"

"Dad pays him sixty a month."

"As little as that? Why——"

"Only enough for one, my dear," laughed Clare. "Not even enough for one to 'almost' love him."

"Well, it isn't very much," agreed Molly.

IT WAS late that evening when the sheriff and his posse rode in at the T-Anchor-Bar; a tired, disgruntled crowd of men. They had found no trace of Cale Pattee; nothing that would give them any clue to his whereabouts.

The sheriff drew Dynamite Denayer aside.

"I know how you stand on law and order, Denayer," he said, "and I want to tell yuh that Rowdy spent the night at the Bar-66. We met him comin' from there this mornin'."

"Is that so?" Dynamite did not seem greatly concerned.

"Slim Lorimer was with him, wasn't he, Limpy?"

"He was not. Slim was with us. After we met Rowdy, they rode away together."

"I see."

Dynamite's lips shut to a straight line and he squinted thoughtfully. He remembered his conversation with Slim that morning, and for a moment he thought that Slim had lied. But he remembered that Slim had only said, "Town," and not in answer to a direct question.

"Wasn't Rowdy in town last night, Limpy?"

"I don't think so."

"Slim was, wasn't he?"

The sheriff spat viciously.

"Yeah, he was there all right."

He remembered what Slim had done to him in the Trail saloon, and it left a bad taste in his mouth.

"You might tell Rowdy to go a little slow," said the sheriff. "There's such a thing as bein' accessory to a crime, yuh know; and, if I wanted to, I could arrest him for blockin' me last night."

"If I was you, Limpy," Dynamite spoke slowly, thoughtfully. "I'd be huntin' for Cale Pattee instead of complainin' around about somebody else. You've got a big bunch of men helpin' you find him; but you'll never get anywhere if yuh sit around and cry over somethin' that happened last night."

"Oh, yeah!"

The sheriff grew sarcastic. He hitched up his belt and adjusted his hat.

"Somebody said that Cale Pattee didn't have a friend in the San Miguel Range, but I'm findin' out that he's got a lot of 'em."

He started away, but stopped when Dynamite grasped him by the shoulder, and said:

"Limpy, I helped elect you, because I thought you might make a good sheriff. But a little official power has swelled your head and put hinges on your tongue until you're going' to lose every friend you ever had. Just think it over."

"Is that so?" Limpy jerked away angrily. "Lemme tell you somethin', Denayer; I've stood all I'm goin' to from your lily-faced son. You better give him some fancy-work to——"

"Shut up, Limpy!"

One of the posse snapped the order. The sheriff had spoken loud enough for all of them to hear. Now he whirled and faced Rowdy Denayer, who had also heard it. He was almost within arm's length of the sheriff, and his face showed dead-white in the dim light, as he leaned forward, both hands dangling at his sides.

"Go ahead and finish what you were sayin'," said Rowdy. "I'll wait for yuh to finish."

There was a silence as they faced each other. Then one of the posse swore softly; a bit-chain jangled.

"Take it easy, Rowdy," breathed Dynamite. "Do a lot of thinkin', boy. It ain't worth a killin'."

"He ain't got the guts to draw a gun," Rowdy's voice was as tense as a fiddle-string. "I never see a coyote yet that had any nerve, if there was half a chance for it to run away."

"Come on, Limpy," said one of the posse. "We came out to hunt for a murderer; not to watch you get so dry yuh can't spit. C'mon."

Limpy Overton turned and walked to his horse. One of the posse laughed mockingly and the sheriff jerked his horse viciously, as he faced Dynamite and Rowdy.

"You needn't think you've run any razoo on me," he said hoarsely. "I've got somethin' to do besides gun-fightin' with every —— fool that packs a gun."

"Just keep that on your mind," said Rowdy quickly. "You might try keepin' your mouth shut, too."

The sheriff realized that the conversation was becoming dangerous again; so he turned his horse and led the posse away. Rowdy and his father faced each other, as the posse faded out of sight.

"What did the sheriff want?" asked Rowdy.

Dynamite Denayer sighed wearily.

"Rowdy, I don't like Limpy Overton; but I can see how he feels. You spent the night at the Bar-66, didn't you?"

"Well?"

"From now on you keep away from there, Rowdy. Pattee is just as good as convicted right now, and if you don't keep away from that good-for-nothin' outfit, you'll go to jail, too.

"Pattee has a bad reputation, and you know it. He's no good. You helped him escape, and the sheriff thinks you went out there last night to help him make his getaway. From now on, you keep away from the Bar-66—or away from here."

"That's real nice of yuh," said Rowdy slowly, and walked away toward the bunkhouse.

"I mean it, Rowdy," called his father, but Rowdy did not reply.

He knew that his father meant every word he said.

" 'Way down in the Lehigh Val-l-ley,
Where the flowers fa-a-ade and bloom,
There lies my blue-eyed El-l-l-la,
So-o-o silent in the to-o-omb."

Dirty Deal sat on the edge of a bunk, his nose pointed upward and wailed mournfully in an unmusical voice:

"She-e-e died not broken-hear-r-rted,
Nor did sickness end her li-i-ife;
It was a black-eyed vill-yun-n-n,
In his hands a dead-lee kni-i-ife."

Arizony Allen sat up in bed and glared at Dirty. Rowdy snorted his disgust and buried his head into a pillow, while Slim Lorimer's right hand eased out from under the blanket and groped for a handy boot-top.

But Dirty seemed all unconscious of these things. He knitted his brow thoughtfully, smiled widely and tipped his head back, again.

"One ni-i-ight when the star-r-r-rs were shinin',
" And the moon was shinin' too-o-o,
Up to the lone-lee-e-e cottige
The jel-yus vill-yun-n-n——"

"Dirty!" Arizony fairly screamed. "Stop it! My ——, you can't sing!"

"I can't?" Dirty seemed astonished. "You mean that it ain't permissible, Mr. Allen; or do yuh insinuate that I ain't got no ability?"

"Yeah, and that ain't all," said Arizony. "Yo're drunk."

"Am I?"

"Yuh danged right yuh are. What time is it?"

"Do yuh take me for a clock?" demanded Dirty. "Or has yuh made a rule that I has to be home at such-and-such a time."

"It's two-thirty in the mornin'," said Slim, digging a watch out of his vest, which hung on his bunk-post.

"And that's a —— of a time to be singin' 'The Murder of Blue-Eyed Ella,' " declared Arizony.

"I sing when I'm happy," said Dirty, examining his knuckles. "I ain't had so much fun for a long time. I was in the Trail saloon when the posse came back, bringin' their horse's tails behind 'em.

"There's a lot of talk, yuh know, and somebody brings Rowdy's name into it. The sheriff has done a heap of talkin', I s'pose, and it naturally causes folks to talk. Somebody wonders out loud jist why Rowdy mixes in to help Pattee.

"I dunno how they know about it; but somebody asks where Rowdy was the afternoon of the holdup. Well, nobody seems to have seen him. Then Mr. Buck Zaney says:

" 'It might be a good thing to find out. Seems like there ain't been no investigation into this thing. Rowdy's takin' too —— much interest in this to not have a finger in the pie some'ers.' "

Dirty laughed joyfully.

"I got right up and I hit Mr. Zaney jist about three inches below his bandages, and if that smart jasper ever wants to smell of anythin' ag'in, he'll have to approach it on his hands and knees. Whoo-ee, I shore made a flat out of a pinnacle."

"Boy, I forgive yuh for yore song," applauded Arizony. "Go right ahead and kill off blue-eyed Ella."

"And then what happened?" queried Slim.

"Oh, not much. Buck curled up on the floor and I backed out, with a gun in my hand. Nobody choosed me; so I came home."

"Well, take off yore clothes and go to bed," said Arizony. "Yo're a hero, all right; but we need sleep."

Dirty shucked off his clothes and crawled into his bunk, after blowing out the light.

"I'm much obliged to yuh, Dirty," said Rowdy seriously.

"Say, yo're sure welcome," chuckled Dirty, and in a few moments his snores blended with those of Slim and Arizony.

But Rowdy did not sleep. For the rest of the night he lay wide-eyed, thinking, planning; resolving to do a thing and rejecting it the next moment. His father had given him an ultimatum regarding the Bar-66. It was either the T-Anchor-Bar or the Bar-66. He could take his choice.

In less than two weeks Smiling Smith and Buck Zaney would demand their money from him—or from his father. Eighteen hundred dollars was a lot of money in the range country.

"And I couldn't raise an umbrella," he mused wearily. "I suppose I might as well take my medicine gracefully. I'm so dang near outlawed now that it won't make much difference, I suppose. I'm a woolly little goat right now; so I might as well grow me some curley horns and start out to be a regular ram."

ROWDY dressed at daylight and went outside. Arizony and Dirty still snored, but Slim slid out of bed and watched Rowdy ride away down the road. Dynamite Denayer also saw Rowdy leave the ranch, and was sitting on the front steps of the ranch-house when Slim came out of the bunk-house.

Slim went up there and sat down. A look of understanding passed between them, and Dynamite said—

"Has he gone to the Bar-66 or to town, Slim?"

Slim shook his head.

"He left without sayin', Dynamite."

"I told him," said Dynamite firmly, "that if he ever went to the Bar-66 again he couldn't come back here again."

Slim studied Dynamite's face for several moments.

"He heard yuh say it, didn't he, Dynamite?" asked Slim.

"Heard me?" Dynamite squinted at Slim. "Of course."

"Well, there ain't nothin' to worry about."

"There ain't?"

"No-o-o," drawled Slim, shaking his head. "I don't look for him to come back to the T-Anchor-Bar."

Slim got to his feet and started around toward the kitchen door, leaving Dynamite staring after him.

But Rowdy was not on his way to the Bar-66; he was going to town. Not that his father's ultimatum made the slightest difference in his plans. He had made up his mind to go down there and show Range City that too much talk was unhealthy.

But he did not know that the San Miguel River was running bank-full again and that the ford had been wiped out. He drew up at the edge of the river and looked gloomily around. It was about a hundred and fifty feet wide of yellow, fast-moving water.

The bank beyond, with the exception of where the cut had been made for the wagon-road, was sheer and muddy. It would appear to be impossible to ride a horse out of that water and on to the bank. It appeared that the road to Range City was effectively blocked.

A lone horseman was riding down the road on the other side of the river, and as he drew closer to the ford, Rowdy saw that it was Skee Belton. He had never liked Belton, although they barely knew each other.

Straight to the ford rode the cowboy, spurring his horse, which seemed frightened of the water. Rowdy yelled a warning to Belton and waved his hat, but Belton only jerked his horse head-on to the river and spurred it savagely.

The frightened horse plunged ahead and for a moment both horse and rider were submerged; but they came up, headed down the stream, the horse floundering wildly. Ahead of them stretched miles of flood, without even a sand-bar to give them a footing.

Rowdy spurred along the opposite bank, yelling advice to Belton; advice that was not heard. Then Belton's horse seemed to whirl into a swifter current. Its head went down and it turned a complete somersault.

Without a thought of his own danger, Rowdy spurred off into the river, loosening his rope. The tall roan was a good swimmer and Rowdy headed it straight for Belton's horse, which was almost submerged.

Belton had managed to cling to the saddle-horn with one hand, but was submerged at every plunge of the fast drowning horse. Rowdy swung in beside them and yelled at Belton to grab his hand; but Belton was so nearly drowned that he did not respond.

Forcing in a little closer, Rowdy roped Belton around under the arms, tore his hand away from the saddle-horn and turned his horse aside, after taking a dally around his own saddle-horn and holding Belton's head out of water.

But Rowdy soon found that his horse was making no headway. Try as he might, they were not gaining at all. Then he found the cause of it all. Belton's horse was nothing but a floating hulk now, and Belton's right foot was caught in a stirrup.

Rowdy's roan was beginning to lunge now, and Rowdy knew that the extra drag had sapped its strength badly. Quickly Rowdy looped the other end of the lariat around his own body and slid out of the saddle. Belton had recovered and was trying to talk, but he was still too dazed to keep his mouth out of water.

Rowdy swung in against Belton and worked his way down Belton's right leg, trying to unhook the imprisoned boot. In some way, the foot had turned and gone completely through the stirrup. It was impossible to bring the boot out.

The double drag on Rowdy's horse had swung them toward the center of the channel, heading for the Range City side. And with a prayer, Rowdy came up, gasping for breath, while the dead horse and saddle rolled away in the yellow flood, carrying Skee Belton's right boot along.

It was impossible for Rowdy to get back to his saddle; so he clung to the lariat rope, while the roan drifted and pawed his way across the river.

They reached the bank about four hundred yards below where they had started and were lucky enough to strike a low,mud-bank to make a landing. The roan stopped almost shoulder-deep, too tired to wade out, while Rowdy floundered up to the saddle.

Skee Belton was able to reach ground with his feet, but was too exhausted to stand alone after Rowdy had loosened the rope, and Rowdy helped him to shore. After a few minutes the roan came ashore and stood with drooping head, looking back at the river.

Skee and Rowdy sat side by side, looking at each other; two muddy, dripping specimens of humanity; limp, even to their vocal cords. Skee was the first to break the silence.

"Thank yuh, kid." His voice was watery and weak.

"Mention it," gurgled Rowdy shortly.

Skee stared at the river, wiped his hand across his mouth and shuddered slightly.

"Horse drownded, did'nt it?" he asked.

Rowdy nodded and motioned down the stream.

"I—I was drunk," croaked Skee. "Never did have much sense."

He stared at the river vacantly and turned to Rowdy.

"My ——! S'pose you hadn't been there? Where'd I be? S'pose you hadn't come in after me, eh?"

Skee shook his head and looked back at the river.

"Foot hung in the stirrup—horse drowning." He shut his jaws tight and shook his head. He realized that only a miracle had saved him from sharing the fate of his horse.

"You—you saved my life, thassall, kid. I can't swim a lick."

"Neither can I," said Rowdy slowly. "Not a lick."

"Yuh can't?"

Skee shook his head.

"You can't swim?"

"Well, I never have, Belton."

"And you come in after me jist the same?" A look of wonder overspread Skee's face. "You took that chance? My ——! You—say, I—I dunno."

He looked vacantly at Rowdy.

"Say, I never done nothin' for you."

Skee seemed filled with wonder that any one, to whom he had never done a favor, would do all this for him.

"You're young Denayer, ain't yuh?" asked Skee.

"Yes," said Rowdy. "I'm Rowdy Denayer."

"Uh-huh. I've heard of yuh."

"Nothin' good," said Rowdy.

Skee shook his head.

"Not very much, Denayer. I don't want to hear anybody speak bad about yuh ag'in."

He squinted at Rowdy, shut his lips tight and held out his muddy hand.

"Denayer, I reckon I ain't smart enough to know jist why yuh took a long chance thataway to save my life, but yuh shore done her. They say yore a wild —— and no good, but I got a —— of a good opinion of yuh m'self."

"I reckon I'm all they say," said Rowdy.

"All right," grinned Skee. "If yuh are—I shore like 'em thataway."

He got unsteadily to his feet and stared down the river, as if it fascinated him. Skee Belton was not without imagination, and his hand trembled slightly, as he ran his fingers through his hair.

"You lost one boot," said Rowdy. "I had to shuck it off."

"My gosh, there's lots of boots, Denayer; but there's only one life inside me. What do we do next—walk?"

The roan had revived sufficiently to snort at Rowdy when he began loosening the lariat rope from the saddle-horn.

"We'll ride double," declared Rowdy. "It ain't far, but it's too far to walk on one boot."

They mounted the roan, which objected to the unusual load, but both of them were good riders and in a few moments the horse was willing to proceed gently. The dust from the road did not improve their appearance to any extent, and they looked like a pair of scarecrows when they reached Range City.

New overalls, underwear, shirt and hat were purchased at the store, and both of them spent much time in cleaning and drying their guns.

"I lost every danged thing I owned," confided Skee. "I had m' worldly goods tied up inside m' tarp and slicker behind that saddle."

"That's hard luck," sympathized Rowdy.

"It shore might 'a' been worse," declared Skee. "When that horse turned me out of the saddle and I hung in that —— stirrup— My ——, it makes me sick at m' stummick to think of it. Let's go and warm our insides."

And the inside warming bid fair to be most complete. They invaded the El Camino Real saloon, leaned against the bar and proceeded to talk about deep rivers they had known. In due course of time they discovered that they had mutual friends; creatures of their imagination.

"Bill Jones?" asked Skee. "Old man Jones' son? Do I know him? Limped in his left leg."

"Limped in both legs," corrected Rowdy.

"Haw! Haw! Haw!" Skee's mirth was very real. "He shore did! First man I ever knowed that limped in both legs. And you knowed him, too! Small world, ain't it. Didja know his cousin?"

"Did I?" Rowdy goggled wisely. "My ——, I knowed all of his family. I knowed his great, great grandfather."

"Aw, that old coot!" snorted Skee. "He was plumb worthless. Let's have 'nother."

They drifted down to the Trail saloon and went inside. Buck Zaney looked them over with unfavorable eyes. Buck's nose was twice its normal size and very red. Skee looked at Buck owlishly and proceeded to tell every one present how Rowdy had saved his life. At times Skee's narrative was interrupted by a crying spell, and he finished by throwing both arms around Rowdy's neck and sobbing on his bosom.

Rowdy was in no shape to stand the pressure; so he proceeded to sit down with Skee in his arms.

"Stop cryin'!" snorted Rowdy. "Yo're saved, you —— fool."

Skee managed to get back to his feet and let Rowdy scramble back to an upright position.

"You two had better go and sleep it off," advised Buck.

"Thasso?" Rowdy managed to get his eyes focused on Buck.

"Skee, looky!"

Rowdy rowled Skee on the ankle.

"Look at Buck Zaney's nose."

"Nose? Tha' ain't no nose," declared Skee. " 'J'ever see a nose that looks like that? Tha's a knob. Betcha if yuh turned it you'd find that his face is hinged on the side."

Buck snorted and started toward Skee, but changed his mind. The tall, evil-faced cowpuncher had interpreted Buck's move and his right hand had jerked back to his gun.

"There ain't no hinges," said Rowdy thoughtfully. "I tried to open him up m'self. Mebbe his face slides, but it won't swing open."

"Haw! Haw! Haw!"

Skee roared with mirth and hammered on the bar with his big palms.

"C'mon and serve the two best men in the San Miguel. Rowdy Denayer and his bes' friend."

"Yee-ow!" yelped Rowdy.

Wham!

He had slid out his six-shooter and drilled a hole in the floor beside the bar. The crowd in the saloon remained silent, and Buck moved away from the bar, after a quick glance at the bartender, who was looking at him. As the two men poured their drinks the sheriff came in. He had heard the revolver shot and was on a tour of investigation. A tall mirror blocked his view to the bar; but he caught Buck's frantic warning signal.

Rowdy, looking into the mirror behind the bar, also saw Buck's signal and spoke quickly to Skee. They both whirled facing the doorway. The sheriff had stopped and was trying to determine just what Buck had meant.

Neither Rowdy nor Skee had made any move to draw a gun. For several moments there was a tense silence, broken by the scrape of the sheriff's footstep, as he turned and went outside. He was taking no chances on the unknown.

Skee laughed and they turned back to the bar where they had another drink, and then went to the back of the room and sat down. Buck eyed them malevolently, but kept away from their vicinity, and the sheriff did not come back.

Neither did the sheriff even investigate the cause or effect of that shot. He was altogether too weary and mad. After the posse had crossed the river on their way home the night before, the sheriff had decided to use strategy.

HE TOOK his deputy with him, sent the posse on to town and went quietly back to the Bar-66. From the ridge of a hill they were able to watch the ranch in the bright moonlight. And in a short time they were rewarded by seeing a rider leave the ranch.

With visions of being led to the hiding-place of Cale Pattee, they had trailed the rider all night and the trail ended back at the Bar-66. The rider proved to be Agnes Pattee. She was unsaddling her horse as they rode past the ranch, and her mocking laughter bit deep into the soul of Limpy Overton.

"She seen us sneak in here last night," declared Limpy hotly. "That's jist what she done. And she led us all over them —— hills, just for the fun of it."

"You're a —— of a mind-reader," retorted "Baldy" Benton, deputy, whose eyes ached for want of sleep. "You allus find out things the next day, Limpy."

"Yeah?" snorted Limpy. "Mebbe you know how to catch Cale Pattee."

"Well, I'm willin' to admit that I don't. That's more'n you'll do."

It was in this frame of mind that Limpy and Baldy came back to Range City; while Slim Lorimer, who had swum his horse across the two forks of the San Miguel, rode up to the Bar-66, looking for Rowdy.

Slim felt sure that Dynamite Denayer was going to come there, and Slim wanted to be sure that Rowdy was not in evidence. He found Spanish Bowman at the barn, repairing a saddle, and Bowman's greeting was anything but cordial.

"Rowdy around here?" asked Slim.

Bowman squinted around the barn.

"I don't see him anywhere, do you?"

"You don't need to be funny with me," said Slim slowly. "Rowdy's my friend."

"All right."

Bowman jabbed an awl into a plank and spat thoughtfully. His repair job seemed of more interest than Slim's conversation. Slim looked around the barn. In a stall near him stood a bay horse that appeared to have been completely ridden-out. Bowman looked up and saw that Slim was looking at the bay, but said nothing.

Slim turned from looking at the bay.

"I want to find Rowdy," he said slowly. "I think his father is comin' over here and I don't want Rowdy to be here when he comes."

"Thasso?"

Bowman squinted thoughtfully as he reached for his awl.

"Mebbe he thinks Rowdy is too good to come here."

"Might be somethin' in that, too," agreed Slim. "The Bar-66 ain't got a very good reputation, yuh know."

"The —— yuh say!" snorted Bowman indignantly.

"You know it as well as I do; so yuh don't need to get hot about it, Bowman."

"Mebbe you're lookin' for Cale Pattee, too, eh?"

Slim grinned and shook his head.

"No-o-o, not me. I might, if they offer a reward."

Slim was deliberately antagonizing Bowman, with the idea of making him mad enough to talk.

"Reward, eh?"

Bowman shook his head.

"They won't never do it, Lorimer. They might offer a reward for the man that held up the stage and shot the driver; but not for Cale Pattee. This county ain't payin' out reward money first and try for conviction afterwards."

"That's right," agreed Slim, "but they seem to think that it's a cinch to convict Pattee. If he hadn't lost that knife they'd never suspected him. It shore don't pay to be careless thataway, Spanish."

Bowman turned back to his work, and Slim continued:

"Pattee can't hide out all his life and he can't clear himself, except in court. Whatsa man goin' to do in a case like that?"

"You might find him and ask that question. I'll be ——ed if I can answer it."

Slim walked back to the door and saw Dynamite Denayer riding in toward the ranch-house. He was minus his hat, and looked as if he had had difficulty in fording the river. At the porch of the ranch-house he dismounted and Agnes Pattee stepped outside the door.

She walked to the edge of the porch and looked down at him. They were too far away for Slim to hear what they were saying. Dynamite looked toward the barn, where Slim's horse was standing, and Slim knew there was no use of concealing himself; so he stepped out and went toward them.

Dynamite was in very bad humor, and glared angrily at Slim. Agnes Pattee's face was white with anger. Slim deducted that there had been bitter words passed between them, and wished he had stayed in the barn with the uncongenial Bowman.

"Beat me over here, eh?" growled Dynamite. "I thought yuh would."

"Why didn't you bring the rest of the ranch?" asked Agnes sarcastically.

"You didn't include me in that order yuh handed Rowdy, did yuh?" Slim spoke softly to Dynamite.

Dynamite snorted angrily. He knew he could not browbeat Slim; so he turned back to Agnes Pattee.

"Maybe you don't understand these things, young lady. If Rowdy don't keep away from here he'll be arrested."

"Rowdy knows this, don't he?" she asked.

"Yeah, he knows it."

Agnes smiled with her mouth.

"Then it's up to him, don'tcha think?"

Dynamite frowned heavily, but ignored her question.

"Where was Rowdy the night before and the day of the robbery?" he asked.

Agnes shook her head quickly.

"I don't know."

"Was he with your father?"

"No."

Dynamite nodded slowly, as if satisfied that she was telling the truth, and then:

"Well, I've warned him against this place. If he comes here again he's all through with the T-Anchor-Bar."

"Why?" asked Agnes quickly.

"Because I don't want him to come here, that's why."

Agnes bit her underlip, as if trying to control her feelings. Slim expected momentarily to hear her turn loose and tell Dynamite what she thought of him; but she only asked softly—

"Are you afraid to tell me why you don't want him to come here?"

"Afraid?" Dynamite laughed hoarsely. "No, I'm not. This place never did have a very good reputation—and look at it now. I don't want my son mixed up with a murderer and stage-robber."

Agnes did not flinch, but her face went dead-white and her eyes shut tightly for a moment. Slim noticed that the knuckles of her clenched hands were like little white knobs.

"Dynamite!" he said warningly.

But Dynamite Denayer was mad.

"I don't see what Rowdy finds so attractive over here," he continued unfeelingly. "There's lots of girls at the other ranches—who dress as they should. Maybe it isn't the clothes that attract him."

Agnes' eyes flashed to her cheap cotton shirt, the unbecoming overalls and short boots. There were tears in her eyes when she looked up, but her lips were shut tight.

"Dynamite," said Slim softly, "you've said about enough."

"Huh?"

Dynamite turned and looked at Slim.

"Whatcha mean?"

"Just this," replied Slim. "I ain't got much use for the Bar-66, nor for the people on it; but I'll be ——ed if I'll stand for you or anybody else makin' that little girl cry."

"Who's cryin'?" demanded Agnes chokingly.

"Maybe the truth hurts," grunted Dynamite.

"Well, she's got enough troubles, I reckon," said Slim. "Nobody likes 'em; and her paw hidin' out from the sheriff."

"Well, he won't hide long," declared Dynamite. "They'll get him."

Dynamite turned and mounted his horse.

"Did you ever think that he might not be guilty?" asked Agnes.

"Huh!" Dynamite snorted his unbelief. "See what the jury thinks when they bring in their verdict. That knife would convict him.

"That knife would?"

Agnes leaned against the porch-post and looked off across the hills.

"Would they hang the man who lost that knife there?"

"Just as sure as death and taxes," declared Dynamite.

"I'm sorry," Agnes sighed as she looked at Dynamite. "It isn't fair."

"All depends on the point of view," said Dynamite.

"I suppose so," said Agnes softly. "You see, dad let Rowdy have that knife several days ago to fix his bridle, and he never gave it back."

She turned and walked back into the house, leaving Dynamite staring after her, his lower jaw sagging, his eyes wide with wonder and amazement. He turned in his saddle and stared at Slim.

"Did—did you hear what she said?" he stammered.

"I reckon we both heard it," said Slim foolishly.

"Well, I don't believe it," declared

Dynamite, and started to get off his horse but Slim stopped him.

"No use arguin' with her about it, Dynamite."

"No use? The —— there ain't! They can't throw the deadwood on to Rowdy thataway; not while I can stop it."

"You cool off," ordered Slim. "She ain't puttin' no deadwood on Rowdy. If she wanted to do that, she'd tell the sheriff instead of you. And I know Rowdy had that knife for several days."

Dynamite scowled down at Slim.

"You knew? Why didn't yuh tell me?"

"I'm as good as Pattee is, Dynamite—almost. He's hidin' out; and he knows who had that knife."

Dynamite nodded wearily and lifted his reins.

"You goin' to town, Slim?"

"Yeah. I'll get my horse."

They rode away from the Bar-66, heading for Range City, both thinking deeply. The full shock of the thing was beginning to affect Dynamite, and his voice was husky when he spoke to Slim.

"And I said that they wasn't fit to associate with my son, Slim. My ——, they know he's guilty, and they're puttin' up with all this for his sake."

"It kinda looks thataway," nodded Slim.

"I don't know what to do." Dynamite spoke as though to himself. "It's bound to come out, Slim. Pattee might be willing to hide out for a while; but if they catch him——"

"He'll have to tell," finished Slim. "You can't expect him to hang and keep his mouth shut."

"Hang?" Dynamite looked queerly at Slim. "Would they hang —— yeah, that's right."

"As sure as death and taxes," said Slim, quoting Dynamite's exact words to Agnes Pattee. "She said it wasn't fair, and you said it was all in the point of view."

Dynamite nodded wearily, his eyes filled with pain.

"Yeah, it's all in the point of view, Slim. God knows I don't know what to do. If we could find Pattee and pay him enough to get plumb out of the country, or—Slim, we've got to keep the sheriff from findin' him. Or we might send Rowdy where they can't find him."

"And let Cale Pattee hang, eh?"

"No, no! That wouldn't be right."

"The things that we worry the most about never happen," said Slim slowly. "Cinch up yore nerves, Dynamite. You look like you'd been accused of the job yourself. There ain't been nobody hurt much yet."

The sheriff was just coming out of his office as they rode past. He squinted angrily at them as he remembered what had transpired at the ranch the night before.

"Hyah, Limpy," called Slim. "Whatcha know today?"

Limpy hesitated for a moment, spat into the street and said:

"Not much. County is offerin' two thousand dollars reward."

"For Cale Pattee?" asked Slim.

Limpy shifted his tobacco.

"Well, it don't specify any one person, but it kinda looks like the man that lands Pattee will get the two thousand. I look for the bank to offer a little bit."

"How much did they lose?" asked Dynamite.

"Ten thousand dollars."

Limpy rolled the words over his tongue, as if he liked the sound.

"Ten thousand dollars. By grab, that's a lot of money."

"Not enough to get hung for," said Slim.

"No-o-o, it ain't. Money never does yuh any good, when yo're standin' on nothin' and lookin' up a rope. River's kinda high t'day, ain't it."

Slim nodded quickly.

"Sure is. Dynamite lost his hat. Didn't yuh get any idea where Pattee went?"

"Not a —— get!"

Limpy spat violently and wondered if they had heard of his wild-goose chase through the hills.

"I'll get him jist the same," he added, but qualified his statement with—

"If he ain't got too —— many friends."

Slim and Dynamite tied their horses to the hitch-rack in front of the El Camino Real and went into the place. There was no sign of Rowdy. They inquired of the bartender, who rubbed his nose thoughtfully and nodded.

"He ain't been here, gents; but I heard he's in town. Him and Skee Belton were raisin' —— down at the Trail, I hear. Somebody said they was shootin' holes in the floor. Seems that Belton tried to ford the river and Rowdy had to pull him out. I reckon they're celebratin'. Whatcha drinkin'?"

But Slim and Dynamite were not drinking. They went to the Trail saloon, but neither Rowdy nor Belton was in evidence. Buck Zaney looked them over carefully, but finally joined them. Slim squinted at Buck's nose and decided that Dirty Deal had quite a punch.

"Seen Rowdy?" asked Slim.

Buck glanced around the room and back at Slim.

"He was here a while ago. Him and Belton were together. Mebby they went out to sleep it off."

"Drunk?" asked Dynamite.

"Y'betcha," nodded Buck emphatically. "Drunk and on the prod. Rowdy shot a hole in the floor over by the bar. If he don't change his ways—" Buck turned to Dynamite—"he'll be gettin' into trouble, Denayer."

"He don't pick trouble, does he?" asked Slim.

"The —— he don't! He thinks that everybody is makin' fun of his face. He's got so danged touchy about his looks that he packs a chip on his shoulder all the time."

"And there's always somebody foolish enough to knock it off," declared Slim.

"Yeah, that's a cinch."

"Will we go huntin' for him or wait for him to show up?" queried Slim of Dynamite.

"Better wait," said Dynamite. "He'll come back."

"Yeah, he'll come back," agreed Buck, and moved away to one of the poker-tables, while Slim and Dynamite sat down at a vacant table to wait.

AND Rowdy's waking was very painful. At first he thought he was roped; but after careful examination he found that he had been sitting with his back against the running-gears of an old wagon, and in some way he had got his head and one arm through the spokes. He managed to extricate himself and sit up.

The world insisted on spinning around with him, and he hated the sensation. He was beside an old corral a short distance from the rear of the Trail saloon. His mouth was as dry as ashes and he could feel his pulse beat at the top of his head.

"I can remember startin' out here," he told himself, trying to think, "but I can't remember arrivin'. Ugh!"

He spat sourly and considered himself,

"All Buck's whisky needs is an oil-paper wrapper to make it dynamite."

He got weakly to his feet, clinging to the old wagon, and swore at his aching head. He wondered what had become of Skee Belton. He tried to squint at the sun to see what time it was; but the effort was too great.

"What do I care what time it is," he asked himself. "I ain't goin' nowhere."

He wended his way carefully between the buildings and came out into the street. The sheriff was tacking a reward notice to the front of a building across the street; so Rowdy picked his way across the street and came up behind the busy sheriff.

"Tha's good job yo're doin'," observed Rowdy thickly, and the sheriff turned his head.

"You pos'in' proclamation?" queried Rowdy, peering at the notice.

"Go home—you're drunk," grunted the sheriff.

"Tha's last place to go when you're drunk, Limpy. Say——"

Rowdy seemed to get a brilliant idea. He backed up about a quarter of the way across the street and squinted at the square of white paper.

"Betcha I can beat yuh shootin', Limpy. C'mere. Two-bits a shot. C'mon."

"Aw-w-w, whatcha talkin' about?" snorted Limpy. "Go home."

"Chase me home," dared Rowdy belligerently. "Yo're scared to shoot with me. Git 'way from that target!"

"Quit that, you —— fool!" yelped the sheriff, as Rowdy fumbled with his gun. "Don'tcha dare do that! Hold on!"

Wham!

Rowdy's first bullet struck a foot below the reward notice, and the sheriff ducked wildly.

"C'mon and shoot!" yelled Rowdy.

Wham! Wham!

He fired twice in quick succession, but the sheriff did not stop to see where the bullets struck; he was legging his way officeward as fast as he could run.

"Whee-e-e-e!" yelped Rowdy. "Hookum cow!"

Wham! Wham!

The next two were wobbling shots; one in the sidewalk and the other about a foot above. Rowdy laughed gleefully, dropped a cartridge when he tried to take one from his belt, and fell flat in the street, trying to pick it up.

He had no more than flattened himself in the dust, when Slim Lorimer landed astride of him. The fusillade had drawn them out of the Trail saloon. Dynamite Denayer was right behind Slim, and between them they disarmed him and lifted him to his feet.

"Goo' shootin'," announced Rowdy, spitting out dust and blinking his eyes at Slim. "Didja see it, Slimmie? Sher'f put up target, but got cold feet when it come to shootin'. He ain't game, don'tcha know it?'

"We'll get his horse and take him home, Slim," said Dynamite.

"Thasso?"

Rowdy shook away from Slim and faced his father, "You'll take me home? Me?"

"Take it easy, Rowdy," advised Slim.

"Yeah, I'll take it easy, Slim; but not goin' home."

He turned to his father.

"You said I couldn't come home, if I ever went to the Bar-66 agin', didn't yuh?"

His father nodded perceptibly, and he almost told Rowdy that he had changed his mind about the Bar-66.

"Well, that's enough for me," said Rowdy slowly.

"But you ain't been there since," reminded Slim.

"No; but I'm goin'," declared Rowdy, picking his hat from the dust.

"You'll be arrested, if you stay here, Rowdy," said his father. "Limpy Overton is just layin' for a chance to throw you in jail. He'll probably arrest you for the shooting you just did, if you don't go away now."

"No he won't."

Rowdy shook his head violently.

"Mebbe he'll talk about it. Limpy likes to talk. Lotta folks like to talk, and I'm goin' to stay here. If I'm here they'll be more careful what they talk about; *sabe?*"

The latter was intended for the ears of those who had come in closer to see what it was all about. Dynamite sighed deeply, shook his head and started for the hitchrack.

"Come on back with us, Rowdy," said Slim softly. "Doggone it, we can fix things up some way."

Rowdy shook his head. Skee Belton was coming across the street, walking on uncertain legs. He looked at the group on the sidewalk and at Rowdy and Slim.

"Whazz goin' on?" he asked thickly. "Anybody botherin' yuh, par'ner?"

"Nope," grinned Rowdy.

"Thazz good," nodded Skee. "I los' yuh, par'ner."

Slim handed Rowdy his revolver and stepped in closer.

"Don't mix up with Belton," he said softly. "He's a bad *hombre*. Go easy, kid; and it'll all turn out fine."

"Much obliged, Slim," said Rowdy, shoving the gun back into his holster.

Slim held out his hand and Rowdy gripped it tightly.

"If yo're frien' of my par'ner—yo're frien' of mine," declared Skee, offering his hand, and added, "till —— plumb freezes over."

Slim shook hands with Skee and went back to the hitchrack, where Dynamite was waiting for him, and they rode out of town toward the T-Anchor-Bar. Rowdy and Skee sat down on the board sidewalk and Rowdy reloaded his gun.

Limpy Overton watched them from around the corner of his office, but made no move to punish Rowdy for his misdeeds. He knew that he could put Rowdy in jail for disturbing the peace; but the game would hardly be worth it. Rowdy would not submit easily, and it might mean serious trouble, especially since Skee Belton had joined him. So Limpy wiped it off the books and confined his thoughts to taking Cale Pattee.

Rowdy told Skee about his target practise and it caused Skee much merriment.

"Let's go and see how close yuh come," suggested Skee.

They went over and leaned against the building, picking out the bullet holes, none of which had hit the notice. Rowdy read the notice aloud to Skee, and they marveled over anybody that would pay two thousand dollars for anything.

"That's a lot of money," declared Skee gravely. "Lot of money."

"Y'betcha," agreed Rowdy. "I know jist how big she is, 'cause I owe eighteen hundred, Skee."

"Eighteen hun'dred dollars? You do? Whaffor?"

"For tryin' to make deuces beat aces."

"Oh, thasso? My gosh, you must 'a' been playin' 'em high, par'ner."

"Yeah, kinda high. 'Course it wasn't all to once."

"Jussasame, that's a lot of money," declared Skee. "Who do yuh owe all that wealth to, par'ner?"

"Keep this under yore hat," warned Rowdy, and Skee nodded.

"I owe Buck Zaney a thousand and Smilin' Smith eight hundred."

"Hoppin' toads! Yuh do?"

Rowdy nodded sadly and sat down on the edge of the side-walk.

"Yeah, I sure do owe it, Skee; and I promised to pay it back in a few days."

"Hard job for to do," observed Skee. "Yuh might put the deadwood on Cale Pattee and git the two thousand. Say, ain't this here Pattee a friend of yours, par'ner?"

"Skee," Rowdy moved in closer, although there was no one within hearing distance, "Cale Pattee is the best friend I ever had."

Skee thought this over carefully, his brow wrinkled down over his small eyes.

"I heard somebody say you was frien'ly, par'ner—you and Pattee."

"He's the best friend I ever had, Skee," repeated Rowdy.

"That's what you think," said Skee. "Maybe he ain't."

"I know he is," declared Rowdy.

"Uh-huh."

Skee rubbed his stubbled chin. "They'll hang him, won't they, par'ner?"

"They'll try."

"Uh-huh. Say, yo're in a —— of a fix, ain'tcha? Yuh owe eighteen hun'red dollars and yore bes' friend is liable to git hung. I reckon that calls for a drink. C'mon."

"Let's go to Smith's place," said Rowdy. "I don't like the effect of Buck's dynamite hooch."

"It shore does upset the intestine," agreed Skee. "We'll try yore eight hundred dollar friend f'r a change."

LIMPY OVERTON watched them go to the El Camino Real, and then saddled his horse. He was not in favor of staying around town and take chances of running into those two wild men. Not that Limpy was a coward. He had as much nerve as the average man, but did not care to match nerve against the brazen foolishness of a pair of wild-eyed cow-punchers.

He knew that Skee Belton was cold-blooded, and a bad man to fool with. Rowdy was as reckless as a young wildcat; and the combination boded no good to any one who crossed them. And not only was Limpy willing to get away from them, but he had a bright idea.

This bright idea concerned the why and wherefor of Agnes Pattee's all-night ride into the hills. Time after time she had tried to shake them off her trail, but they had managed to follow her all night.

And Limpy had finally reasoned thus:

"Why did she try to shake us, unless she was tryin' to make us think that she was goin' to Cale Pattee's hidin' place? She knew we were watchin' the ranch; so she led us away. Cale Pattee is at the Bar-66, and not in the hills."

Which was fairly good reasoning for a man who had ridden all night and was still smarting from a girl's mocking laugh. So he took to the hills and rode slowly. It was late in the afternoon and the air was getting chilly.

Far back in the hills the sun still glinted on rifts of snow, which were packed in the hollows It had been a long, hard Winter, with a mighty snowfall in the hills, which accounted for the abnormally high water in the San Miguel

On the South slopes of the hills, a carpet of green had already appeared and the cottonwoods were budding Many cattle dotted the hills, staring suspiciously at him as he rode past; and almost as wild as the black-tail deer which mingled with the herds at the higher levels.

Limpy circled to the far side of the Bar-66, and rode down a brushy coulée behind the bar, where he left his horse. Smoke was pouring from the stove-pipe in the ranch-house, and a breeze brought an odor of food to his nostrils. He sneaked in behind the barn and peered around the corner.

He jerked back as Spanish Bowman came out of the barn door and started for the house. Another cautious glance showed Agnes Pattee on the porch of the ranch-house. She was looking searchingly at the hills, as if looking for some one. Spanish stopped and looked back at the hills behind the barn. Limpy wondered if there was any possible chance that Spanish might have seen him.

But Spanish turned and looked another direction. Finally he walked up to the porch and stood talking to Agnes. Limpy rubbed a splinter into his nose from the corner of the barn, in trying to watch it all with one eye.

Spanish and Agnes were both scanning the hills now, and Limpy wondered if they were watching for Cale Pattee to come home. Then the girl went into the house and Spanish sat down on the edge of the porch, smoking a cigaret.

Limpy swore softly, but kept his eye glued on Spanish. He knew that Cale Pattee had not been at the ranch when the posse had searched the place. They had invaded the house and made their search, after which they had split up into three parties and searched every possible hiding-place around the ranch.

Limpy's nose was getting tired from pressing against rough lumber, when Agnes Pattee came back to the porch, carrying what appeared to be several rugs. She went to the edge of the porch and shook one of them violently. Several times she shook the rugs, and Limpy grinned gleefully.

There was no doubt in his mind but what this was a signal to Cale Pattee that the coast was clear. She dropped the rugs in a heap and seemed to be arranging them. Limpy wondered why Spanish did not help her shake the rugs, instead of sitting there and doing nothing.

After a few moments she got up, picked up the ends of the rugs and started into the house with them. Limpy gasped and rubbed his nose raw, when he jerked back and sat down against the barn.

"Whatcha know about that?" he grunted half-aloud.

After a few moments he peered out again. Spanish was still in the same place, leaning back against a porch-post, looking toward the hills.

Limpy laughed foolishly, softly, and circled the barn. This took him to a point where the corner of the ranch-house cut off his view of the front porch, but still left him in full view of the side windows and the kitchen door.

As he studied the situation, Agnes Pattee came out of the kitchen door and stood there, looking into the hills. Limpy swore softly. A gray cat and two little kittens were crossing the yard, and Agnes caught sight of them.

The kittens were barely old enough to walk, and seemed amazed at everything in the new world they were just discovering. Agnes called to the cat, which waited for its babies and then went slowly to her. Limpy watched her pick up the two kittens and fondle them, holding them up under her chin.

She gave a quick glance around and went quickly back into the doorway; and Limpy surmised that she had gone in to exhibit the new kittens. He stepped out boldly and ran to the kitchen door, taking a chance of being discovered. He halted almost at the doorway and drew his gun.

He could hear voices from within the house. After a moment's hesitation, he carefully opened the door and stepped inside. His coming was so stealthy that no one heard him. Cale Pattee and his wife were seated at the kitchen table, their back to him, while Agnes, with the two kittens in her arms, stood near them, turned half-away from the doorway.

Then something caused her to turn and she saw Limpy. For a moment she merely blinked at him; then her arms went limp and the two kittens went clawing down her clothes to the floor.

Cale Pattee had been looking up over his right shoulder at her, and her expression caused him to whirl the other way.

"Don'tcha move any further, Pattee," warned the sheriff. "I've gotcha dead t' rights this time."

Pattee stared at him for several moments and then turned to his wife, who was nervously brushing her hair with one hand and shaking from the sudden shock of it all.

"Well, ma," he said slowly. "I reckon yore advice was the best; but I did want to set at a table with yuh."

She tried to speak, but the best she could do was to put a hand on his arm and squeeze tight.

"I never thought about that porch," admitted Limpy, laughing. "It sure was clever the way yuh got out, Pattee. I thought sure that the shakin' of them rugs was a signal to you in the hills. Yessir, I sure did.

"And then when I seen that pile of rugs kinda hump up, and yuh wasn't so well-covered from my side that I didn't see one of yore arms and hand—well, it was a clever scheme to pile up the rugs and move a board aside."

"It was my fault," quavered Mrs. Pattee. "He—he wanted us to feed him under there, but I——"

"Ma, I wanted to come," interrupted Pattee. "Don'tcha blame yourself, Honey. I—I reckon it was worth it—to eat a meal with yuh."

Pattee turned to the sheriff.

"That's what yuh get for not heedin' advice, Limpy. Ma said I ought to stay under there. Dawg-gone it, she allus was right."

"Just be careful where yuh put yore hands as yuh get up," advised Limpy. "Got a gun on yuh, Pattee?"

"Nope."

Pattee shook his head and held both hands in sight as he got to his feet.

"I didn't expect to need one."

Limpy looked him over speculatively.

"All right," he said slowly. "I dunno about Bowman, out there at the front. Mebbe we better all move out there and tell him the news."

Limpy motioned toward the inner door and they preceded him out to the front porch, where Spanish gawped widely when he saw the sheriff. He was wearing a belt and gun, but took them off at the sheriff's suggestion.

"Well, I'll be teetotally ——!" grunted Spanish, and that seemed to be the extent of his vocabulary.

"You saddle a horse for Pattee," ordered the sheriff.

Bowman glanced quickly at Pattee.

"Go ahead, Spanish," said Pattee, and then to Limpy, "You ain't got nothin' ag'in' the rest of the family, have yuh?"

Limpy shook his head.

"Not that I know about. Personally, I ain't got nothin' ag'in' you, Pattee; but the law wants yuh."

"That's all right," nodded Pattee wearily. "I s'pose I'll have to face the music."

He turned to his wife and Agnes.

"Don'tcha worry too much. Mebbe it's better this way."

"You can come in and see him," said Limpy generously. "The law can't stop yuh from doin' that."

Pattee mounted the horse which Spanish saddled, and the sheriff led it back into the hills to where his horse was hidden. Pattee waved a good-by to those at the ranch-house, as they circled back to the road.

The sheriff did not handcuff Pattee, nor did he have a rope on Pattee's horse. It was growing dark now and the sheriff rode cautiously. He did not want to meet any one. Just before they reached town he led the way in a roundabout way that would bring them to the jail from the rear.

"What's the main idea?" asked Pattee.

"Better be safe than sorry," said the sheriff wisely. "Yuh see, Kelly was well-liked around here and he left a wife and two little kids. Yuh never can tell what folks might decide to do."

"I *sabe* the idea," said Pattee. "It sure was tough on them and I feel sorry."

They dismounted at the rear of the jail, which was built at the rear of the sheriff's office, and Pattee was locked into a cell. The jail was only a frame structure, fairly well-constructed, and took up about half of the building.

The sheriff stabled Pattee's horse and went to his own little shack, which was about half a block to the rear. No one had seen them and the sheriff chuckled over the fact that he had his man safely behind the bars at last.

Even Baldy Benson did not know about it. The sheriff built a fire in his cook-stove and prepared to cook a meal.

DYNAMITE DENAYER had little to say to Slim on the way back to the T-Anchor-Bar that afternoon. The river had fallen enough for them to swim their horses safely across, although the crossing left them soaked with muddy water.

Arizony and Dirty had but lately ridden in from the hills and were engaged in cleaning up, when Slim invaded the bunk-house.

"What's new in town?" asked Dirty, screwing his lathered face painfully under the pull of a dull razor.

"You fellers goin' to town?" asked Slim, ignoring Dirty's question.

"Saturday night," grunted Arizony, which was sufficient answer in the range country.

"We aims to partake of the flesh-pots," grinned Dirty.

"And jack-pots," added Arizony, digging into his war-bag and strewing clothes widely.

"My ——, you ain't goin' to wear them ice-cream pants, are yuh?" snorted Dirty.

"Whatsa matter with them white pants, Mr. Deal?"

Arizony held up the offending trousers and looked them over.

"Well, I dunno what it is, but it's somethin,'" declared Dirty. "Mebbe yore particular beauty don't run to white. Anyway, they don't look good on yuh."

"They ain't as white as they was," offered Arizony.

"They still favor their original color," argued Dirty, "and as long as there's a tinge of white left they won't look good upon yuh, cowboy."

"They ain't noways cheap." Arizony still favored wearing them, and was willing to argue in their favor.

"I paid twenty-five dollars for 'em, and I can prove it by the price-tag, which is still on 'em."

"Just the same, yuh don't need to parade yore ignorance of prices," declared Dirty "You got stung, thasall."

Arizony sighed deeply and laid them aside in favor of a plaid pair, which were decidedly bell-bottom and full of wrinkles.

"See Rowdy in town?" asked Dirty.

"Yeah."

Slim had been sitting on the corner of a table, fumbling with an old deck of cards, but now he got up and sat on his bunk.

"Can you fellers keep somethin' under yore hat?" he asked.

"Eh?" Dirty turned from the cracked mirror and looked at Slim. "What's gone wrong now, Slim?"

"Can yuh keep still, I asked yuh," said Slim seriously.

"Y'betcha," nodded Arizony, and Dirty blinked an affirmative, while he held a forefinger over a razor cut on his cheek.

"Rowdy had that knife at the time of the holdup," said Slim softly. "Pattee is hidin' out, but he knows that Rowdy had that knife."

"Yuh mean—" Arizony moved in closer to Slim—"yuh mean that Rowdy pulled that job, Slim?"

"It shore looks like it."

"Ain't he the little ——?" demanded Dirty. "Whatcha know? Does the sheriff know this, Slim?"

"Nope—not yet. But when he does, Rowdy's cake will be all dough. That knife belongs to Cale Pattee, but I'll betcha Cale Pattee will tell who had it when they catch him."

"Is that all the evidence they've got?" asked Arizony.

"Well, that looks like a-plenty, don't it?"

"Uh-huh, it shore does. Well, well! And yuh say that Rowdy is still in town?"

"Yeah. He's drinkin' liquor with Skee Belton, and one or both of 'em will likely get killed before mornin'. Rowdy pulled Belton out of the river this mornin', and Belton thinks Rowdy is a whizzer. I guess they had a quite a time."

"Well, Rowdy is a whizzer," declared Arizony. "Wonder what he done with the money?"

"Money won't bring Kelly back to life," said Slim softly. "That's the tough part of the whole deal. If it was only a ordinary holdup—well, there ain't none of us so saintly that we'd turn up our noses."

"Oh, that money part ain't nothin'," agreed Dirty. "We've all got them kinda skillingtons in our closet."

"Cowboy, yuh shore can murder them big words," observed Arizony." There ain't no such word as skillington. It's skel-a-ting."

"All right, Mr. Webster," grinned Dirty, "it don't make no difference—they all rattle in the wind. You pretty near ready to hit the trail?"

"All but m' boots. Say, Slim; do yuh reckon they could hang Pattee on jist that —— knife?"

"Unless he could prove that Rowdy had it."

"And then they'd hang Rowdy; is that the idea?"

"Kinda looks thataway, Arizony."

"Feller," grunted Dirty, drawing on his chaps, "feller hadn't ought to put his initials on nothin'."

"No time neither," agreed Arizony. "C'mon, Dirty."

They saddled and rode away from the ranch, while Slim went up to the house. He wanted to go with them, but felt that it might be better to stay at the ranch. Dynamite and the two girls were in the living-room, a silent trio. Slim came in softly and sat down.

It reminded Slim of a funeral, and he felt that Dynamite had told them about Rowdy. Clare glanced at Slim and he could see that she had been crying. Dynamite was hunched over in a rocking-chair, his chin on his hands.

After a long silence Clare spoke to Slim.

"You know all about it, don't you?"

"Well, I know about all there is to know." Slim smiled just a trifle. "It may not be as bad as it looks."

"It looks awful bad." Thus Dynamite hoarsely.

He cleared his throat and leaned back in his chair.

"Rowdy's made his bed and I reckon he's got to sleep on it."

"Are you going back on him, dad?" asked Clare.

"Goin' back on him? I dunno. I never did understand him. He grew up hatin' himself for his looks. Even when he was a little kid the other kids called him 'Sissy' and he hated 'em all.

"He kept away from parties and dances; wouldn't mix with folks at all. They had the idea that he was high-toned, when he was only too sensitive to take a chance on havin' somebody make remarks about his face.

"After while he hates himself so much that he don't care what happens, and then he turns right around and horns into everythin'; kinda darin' anybody to laugh at him. He got so he'd shoot if anybody batted an eye."

Dynamite stopped and shook his head slowly.

"To hear you talk," observed Slim, "a feller would think that Rowdy was dead."

Dynamite got up and went slowly up the stairs. He had aged years since morning and his hand groped uncertainly for the side of the stairway door.

Clare turned and put her hand on Molly's arm.

"Molly," she said, "I'm sorry this had to happen to spoil your visit. I—I know how you must feel."

"Don't you worry about me," said Molly softly. "I only hope I can be of some service to you and your father."

"Well, let's look at the bright side of it," suggested Slim. "Mebbe they won't catch Pattee. Lotsa things can happen in the next few days."

"But they'll catch him eventually," said Clare fearfully.

"Yuh never can tell, Clare."

"Anyway," said Molly, "I do not believe that Rowdy ever did it. It was done for money, and Rowdy surely wasn't in need of money."

Slim glanced quickly at Clare. Both of them knew that Rowdy had spent much money during the past year, and Slim knew that Dynamite had cut off Rowdy's allowance.

"Well," said Molly slowly, "he didn't need that much. But I can never believe that Rowdy would shoot a man."

"Now yo're talkin' sense," applauded Slim. "Let's all start thinkin' that Rowdy never done it."

"That might be the best thing to do," said Clare.

She took a match from the mantel and lighted the big center lamp, which cast a mellow glow over the room.

"Arizony and Dirty went to town," offered Slim. "That river sure makes it bad travelin'. If the water don't go down real soon, I'm goin' to stay here. I've had two baths today and I feel kinda tender."

"Did you see Agnes Pattee today?" asked Clare.

Slim nodded.

"Yeah, I was with your dad. I feel sorry for her, Clare. She's so dog-gone lonesome lookin'."

"Dressed in overalls, I suppose," smiled Clare.

"Oh, sure. I never seen her in a dress, except the night of the golden weddin'. She's kinda pretty, don'tcha know it? She never swore once today either."

"Was there any chance that she was lying about that knife?" asked Molly.

"Not a chance."

Slim shook his head quickly.

"Nossir, she was tellin' the truth."

There was a long period of silence. Slim picked up an old magazine and looked idly through the pages. They could hear Dynamite Denayer moving around upstairs. Suddenly a dog barked snappily and Slim lifted his head.

Came the sound of a swiftly moving horse, which came to a stop near the front of the house; a shuffle of running feet across the porch, and the door opened to admit Agnes Pattee.

She was still dressed in her boyish clothes, her hair wind-blown and she was panting from her long ride. As she came in closer, they could see that she was wet from her crossing of the San Miguel. Slim had got to his feet and she spoke directly to him.

"Where is Mr. Denayer?"

"Why, he's upstairs," said Slim. What's the matter?"

"Will you call him?" she asked, "I must——"

Came the clump of footsteps on the stairs, and a moment later Dynamite appeared. He stared at Agnes and looked quickly around the room.

"What is it?" he asked wonderingly.

"The sheriff caught my dad a while ago," panted Agnes, "and took him to jail."

"Caught him?" wondered Dynamite. "You mean——"

"My ——, don'tcha understand United States?" she blurted, "The sheriff arrested him!"

"Yes, yes, I hear you," said Dynamite nervously. "Won't yuh set down, girl?"

"Nope."

She shook her head violently.

"My dad has gone to jail for somethin' he never done. What are you goin' to do?"

"Goin' to do?"

Dynamite looked around blankly.

"Why, I—I don't just know. Are you sure——"

"I seen him leave with the sheriff," she said wearily. "That's sure enough to suit me."

Dynamite sat down in his rocking-chair and stared at the floor. The girl from the Bar-66 stood there, making squashing noises with the water inside her boots, while Clare and Molly watched her wide-eyed.

But she paid them no heed, as she watched Dynamite Denayer. Then she lifted her eyes to Slim and a ghost of a smile crossed her lips, as she said—

"I reckon it's still all in the point of view."

Slim nodded sadly.

"Yeah, I s'pose it is. There wasn't no trouble, except just the arrest, was there?"

"Nope. The sheriff was smarter than we thought. Well——"

She looked back at Dynamite and turned to the door.

"I reckon that's all I had to say. Good-by."

"Good-by," said Slim, as the door closed behind her.

They heard her ride away and Dynamite lifted his head as the hoof-beats died away in the distance. He listened for a moment, his shoulders hunched wearily, and turned toward the stairs.

"We'll go to town in the mornin'," he said slowly, and went back upstairs.

Clare got to her feet and crossed to the front window, looking nervously out into the night. Slim still stood beside the table, his fingers still gripping the old magazine.

Then Clare turned and came up to him, and they looked into each other's faces.

"Slim," she said slowly, "there's only that pocket-knife for evidence."

He nodded and looked away from her.

"Just a pocket-knife, Slim," she persisted. "Where would it be kept?"

"Why," Slim half-smiled. "I dunno, Clare. Likely in the sheriff's safe."

"In the sheriff's safe, Slim? Just inside a little safe?"

"I dunno the size of the safe, Clare."

"If they didn't have that knife for evidence, Slim; what would they do?"

"If they didn't have it? I dunno. But they've got it."

"But if they didn't have it, Slim? If it wasn't there when they needed it for evidence, what then?"

Slim looked into her eyes and a smile lifted the corners of his mouth.

"Clare, are you—shucks, I couldn't do anythin' like that?"

Tears came to her eyes and she started to put a hand to her face, but Slim caught it.

"F'r gosh sake, don't cry!" he blurted, "I'll get that darned knife for yuh, Clare."

"Slim, do you mean that?" she cried. "Do you? Oh, I could love you for that, Slim Lorimer."

"Well—all right," breathed Slim. "That's—fine."

He picked up his hat and bolted out of the door.

ROWDY and Skee Belton had the town pretty much to themselves that evening. Baldy Benson was wise enough to hide out, for fear he might be wanted, and there was no one else to stop them from doing about at they pleased.

Arizony and Dirty rode in and stabled their horses, but did not trouble to hunt for Rowdy. To all appearances they were not at all interested in his affairs, and they immediately proceeded to get a few drinks under their belts.

They met Buck Zaney in the Trail saloon, and Dirty expected Buck to retaliate for the knob-like nose that Dirty had imposed upon him, but Buck ignored them completely.

Arizony studied Buck closely and imparted the information to Dirty, that Buck was worried about something.

"Worried?" chuckled Dirty. "Y'betcha he's worried. I never hit a man yet that didn't get worried for fear I'd do it all over ag'in."

"Cheer yoreself, cowboy," advised Arizony. "Buck played in hard luck, thasall. He can lick anybody around here, if he has a even break. Rowdy pistol-whipped him, and you got in a lucky punch. Don'tcha ever think that Buck Zaney can't fight."

"Rowdy can whip him," declared Dirty.

"Not unless he's sober, he can't. Buck outweighs him by forty pounds, and Buck's as hard as nails. And besides, Buck used to be a prize-fighter."

"Yo're commencin' to scare me," declared Dirty. "I'm almost sorry I ever punched his nose—almost. Well, are yuh ready to go?"

"I've been ready f'r twenty minutes."

They went outside and crossed the street to a general merchandise store, where they purchased some tobacco. There were several men in the store, talking range gossip with the proprietor. Arizony and Dirty went outside and stood close to an alley, as they rolled smokes.

"You *sabe* the place, don'tcha?" queried Arizony.

"This," said Dirty softly, "is a —— of a time to start askin' a thing like that. C'mon."

They turned and walked back through the alley.

More cowboys drifted into town and the hitch-racks filled rapidly. From the El Camino Real and the Trail came bursts of laughter, the rattle of poker-chips, the dull intonations of the gamblers.

Men laughed joyously as they rattled their spurs across the saloon thresholds, greeting their range neighbors with raucous shouts. It was the big night of the week and none of them cared about tomorrow. They were like a crowd of overgrown boys on a vacation.

Rowdy leaned against the El Camino Real bar and looked them over with gloomy eyes. He had drunk little since the target episode. Somehow his stomach rebelled against liquor. He still had enough "hang-over" to make him reckless.

But he had lost his partner. Skee Belton had gone out the rear of the saloon and had not come back. Rowdy remembered that some one had spoken to Belton; some one who said that somebody wanted to see him.

And Belton had not come back. Rowdy peered at his watch. It was half-past two. Rowdy had neglected to wind it. He put the watch back in his pocket and shoved away from the bar. Men spoke to him, but he did not answer.

It was dark outdoors, and a cold wind was blowing in from the north. Rowdy walked down the rickety sidewalk a little way and sat down on the edge. He took off his hat and let the wind cool his head. The air revived him to a certain extent, and he noticed that he was almost directly across from the sheriff's office.

Men were coming and going on both sides of the street. The little restaurant was doing a big business with the wide-hatted gentry, but the bulk of the activity was on Rowdy's side of the street.

Then Rowdy remembered that his horse was still at the hitch-rack. He was usually very solicitious about the welfare of his tall roan, and swore inwardly for leaving it there all day without water or feed.

He got to his feet, stretched painfully and stepped off into the street. His head was turned toward the front of the sheriff's office, which was unlighted. Rowdy remembered distinctly that all was dark within.

Then everything flashed into a bright light; an infernal glare, followed by a mighty, ear-splitting crash, which seemed to shake the whole world. Rowdy stumbled and fell down on his hands and knees, his eyes almost blinded by the sudden light.

Then the roof of the world seemed to be falling in. It came in sections, which splintered and bounced. Something landed within a few feet of Rowdy; something that struck with a metallic sound, driving sparks from the hard ground of the street.

Rowdy staggered to his feet and looked around. Men were running across the street, shouting, swearing. The light in the restaurant and the general store had gone out with the crash. A horseman drew up near Rowdy and dismounted. It was Slim Lorimer. He did not recognize Rowdy, who had sat down on the large metallic-like thing which had fallen, and led his horse to the El Camino Real, where men were crowding out on to the sidewalk.

Some of them ran toward the sheriff's office, shouting their wonder, and in a few moments Limpy Overton's voice joined the rest. Other men crossed until nearly every one was out of both gambling houses.

There was much loud speculation, swearing and questions. But Rowdy stayed where he was. Men were lighting matches, and in a few minutes some one produced a lantern to light up the scene.

The whole front of the sheriff's office was missing. In fact, the roof was nearly all gone. Rowdy was able to see all this and he marveled exceedingly. Then he heard Limpy Overton's voice, swearing bitterly, threateningly.

"What was that?" yelled some one.

There was a babel of questions, and Limpy's high-pitched voice in answer.

"Yuh danged right I had him. I arrested him this evenin' and jailed him."

"Yuh say he's gone?" yelled a voice.

"My ——, o' course he's gone!" wailed Limpy. "The whole side wall of the jail fell down."

"Probably blowed Pattee plumb out of the country!" grunted one of the crowd. "My ——, it sure was some jar, gents!"

"Betcha it never hurt him a-tall," retorted the sheriff. "The partition kinda cut off the force of it, and the —— old jail wall jist laid down, thasall."

Rowdy grunted wonderingly and started to get to his feet. The lantern was coming toward him, as Limpy, followed by half of the San Miguel country searched the street for what had come down.

"Here's yore sign, Limpy," called a voice.

"What'll he hook it on to?" laughed another.

Limpy lifted his lantern and looked at Rowdy. He grunted indignantly when he saw what Rowdy was sitting on.

"What in —— are yuh doin' with my safe?" he demanded angrily. "Look at him, settin' on my safe."

He appealed to the crowd around him.

"Mebbe," grunted one of the cowboys, "mebbe he wants to hold it down for yuh."

Rowdy got up and let Limpy examine it. It was a cheap iron affair, smoke-blackened but little damaged. Limpy examined the door, which was still intact, although wedged too tight ever to open on its own hinges again.

"Well, it's still locked," grunted Limpy with evident relief, and then he looked at Rowdy, holding the lantern almost shoulder high.

"What were you doin' out here?" he demanded.

"Settin' on yore safe," said Rowdy slowly.

"Thasso? Mebbe you know who dynamited my place."

"Was it dynamited?" asked Rowdy innocently.

"Was it? My ——! Would anythin' weaker than dynamite blow that safe plumb out here? What I want to know is this: Who done it?"

"Mebbe Cale Pattee had dynamite in his pocket," suggested some one.

"Naw, he didn't," declared Limpy. "Somebody aimed to blow him loose, thasall."

Slim had stepped in beside Rowdy and was looking at the safe. Limpy scowled at Slim.

"You'll have to use dynamite to open the thing," said Slim. "She's sure bent inward."

"Thasso?" Limpy grunted angrily. "Well, there ain't nothin' in the —— thing, except a box of ca'tridges and a bottle of liniment. I don't trust no safe, y'betcha. All my money stays right in m' pocket."

The crowd had been sufficiently entertained and were beginning to dribble back to the saloons.

"Whatcha want done with the safe?" asked one of the men.

"Well—" Limpy reflected for a moment, looking around—"I ain't got no place for it, I reckon. We'll put her on the sidewalk for the night. Somebody'd stumble over it out here."

Slim and Rowdy walked back to the front of the El Camino Real, where they leaned against the wall near the window.

"Didja know that Limpy had Pattee in jail?" asked Slim.

"Not until the big crash was over," replied Rowdy. "It sure was news to me. Who do yuh suppose blew up the place?"

"Got me fightin' my hat," admitted Slim, and then in a lower tone, "Agnes Pattee rode over and told us about it."

"She did? Over to the ranch?"

"Yeah. Yuh know, she told yore dad about you borrowin' that knife—the one the sheriff found."

Rowdy grunted softly and stared at Slim. His face looked pinched and drawn under his wide sombrero brim. His fingers fumbled at his belt and he looked away.

"Was that the same knife, Slim?" he asked in a half-whisper.

"You knew it was, didn't yuh, Rowdy?"

"No, I didn't, Slim. But—" he hesitated for a moment—"I'm glad it was. I feel better about it now. How long have you knowed it?"

"Today. Agnes said that you borrowed it to fix a bridle and never gave it back."

"That's right, Slim. What did dad say about it?"

"He's all broke up, Rowdy. I never seen him take anythin' as hard as he took that."

"And Agnes told him, eh?" Thoughtfully. "Well, I reckon that blood is thickest after all."

"What do yuh mean, Rowdy?"

"Ne' mind. Did yuh see Skee Belton since yuh came in?"

"Nope. I came in just at the crash."

"C'mon."

Rowdy led the way into the El Camino Real and they looked over the crowd. The place was filled with men and women, but of Skee Belton there was no sign. Smiling Smith met them and they asked of Belton; but Smiling had not seem him.

At the Trail saloon they inquired of the bartender, but in vain. Buck was running a roulette game and the play was heavy so they did not question him. He gave them a black look and went on spinning the wheel.

They crossed to the store, where men were still talking about the explosion, which had jarred out the oil-lamps, and at the restaurant, which was filled with diners; but there was no sign of Skee Belton.

"Mebbe he's gone to bed," offered Slim.

"Well, he might." Rowdy was dubious over this.

They went back to the El Camino Real and found Arizony and Dirty standing at the bar with Limpy Overton.

"Howdy, gentlemen!" greeted Arizony. "Join our party."

Limpy started away. He had no desire to mix with Rowdy again, but Rowdy stepped in front of him.

"Don't be sore, Limpy," grinned Rowdy. "I apologize for what I done. Yuh can't ask no more than that, can yuh?"

"Well," Limpy hesitated, squinted at Rowdy for a moment and turned back to the bar.

"Dang it all," he said wearily, "I never know when yo're serious and when yuh ain't, Rowdy."

"Neither can I," laughed Rowdy, slapping the sheriff on the back. "So we're horse-and-horse. They tell me that you arrested Cale Pattee this afternoon."

Limpy squinted at Rowdy's face.

"They tell yuh, do they? I'm wonderin' if yuh needed to be told?"

"Now," said Rowdy meaningly, "yo're the one that's tanglin' the loop, Limpy."

"All right," grunted Limpy. "I'll take yore word for it. Yeah, I arrested Pattee at his home, brought him down here and put him in jail, and somebody blowed him loose. I had me a plate of hot soup on the table, when the thing went off, and it all fell in my lap. Knocked down my stove-pipe, too."

"Did anybody see yuh bring Pattee in?" asked Slim.

"I didn't think so; but I reckon they did. That's a —— of a way to turn a man loose, don'tcha think. They took one awful chance of killin' him. Well, here's hopin' I catch him again'."

Rowdy poured his drink into a cuspidor and Slim lighted a cigar. Arizony and Dirty drank deeply, shuddered a duet over the strength of the liquor and moved over to a poker-game.

Limpy also moved away and joined Smiling Smith.

"What next?" asked Slim.

Rowdy leaned back against the bar and squinted thoughtfully over the making of a cigaret. A man was coming through the crowd from the rear of the room and they recognized Uncle Johnny Marsh. He came up to the bar, looking at his hands in the stronger light. They were streaked with something that was red and sticky. He glanced at Slim and Rowdy, nodded quickly and spoke to the bartender.

"You got a lantern around here?"

"Lantern?" queried the drink dispenser. "Yeah, I think there's one here."

He walked to the upper end of the bar and stooped over in his search. Uncle Johnny rubbed his thumb and fingers together and glanced around the room. He saw Limpy talking to Smith and went over to them.

A word or two caused Limpy to get excited and they came back to the bar together. The bartender had found the lantern and handed it to Uncle Johnny.

"What's wrong, Uncle Johnny?" asked Slim.

"Come and see, Slim."

Slim and Rowdy followed them out the rear door, where Uncle Johnny lighted the lantern and led the way out to the old corral behind the Trail saloon. They circled to the far side. A team of horses, hitched to a wagon, were tied to the corral fence, and Slim recognized them as belonging to Marsh.

Just beyond the team they stopped and Uncle Johnny held the lantern glow on the huddled body of a man. They all moved in closer and the sheriff knelt beside him.

"It's Skee Belton!" gasped Rowdy.

"Yeah, that's who it is," agreed the sheriff.

He fumbled with Belton's shirt, examining him carefully before getting up.

"He's still alive," he announced. "We've got to get him to a doctor."

"Looks like somebody had tried to beat his head off," observed Slim softly.

"Sure does," agreed Limpy. "I don't think he's been shot. Somebody done a quiet job. How didja happen to find him, Marsh?"

"A dog was barkin' at him," said Uncle Johnny. "I came out here to get my team. Thought that the dog was barkin' at me, at first; but he acted so danged funny that I lit a match and investigated. Got blood on my hands, too. Say, we can put him in my wagon and take him to the doctor, can't we?"

"Good scheme," agreed Limpy, and they placed Belton in the wagon-box.

It did not take them long to reach Doctor Goddard's home and remove Belton to a bed. The doctor was a middle-aged practitioner, with years of experience in wound surgery.

"Possible fracture," he said, after a quick examination. "Don't see how he escaped death. Whoever did this tried to do a complete job."

"Looks like they used a wagon-spoke," said Slim.

"Yes, it might have been. Blunt instrument of some kind."

"Do yuh think he'll live?" asked Rowdy.

"He's still alive," smiled the doctor. "It will take a little time to determine just how badly he is hurt. Who is he?"

"Name's Belton," said Limpy. "Not much good, I reckon."

"That'll be about all from you," said Rowdy meaningly.

"Friend of yours?" asked the doctor, half-smiling.

"I dunno," said Rowdy. "He said he was."

The doctor's wife came in to assist him, so Slim and Rowdy went outside with Uncle Johnny.

"Who do yuh reckon hit Belton?" queried Slim. "Did he have trouble with anybody today, Rowdy?"

"I don't think so." Rowdy tried to recall some of the things they did during the day, but there was nothing that might incite any one to murder.

"Well, I've gotta be driftin' home," said Uncle Johnny. "Aunt Lizzie will wonder what's keepin' me, and she'll smell my breath every five minutes until she's satisfied I ain't holdin' it."

"You ain't been to the ranch to see us for a long time," reminded Slim.

"Water's too high, Slim. I ain't no danged hell-diver. How's all the folks?"

"Fine. How's yours?"

"All right. C'm over and see us."

Uncle Johnny drove away and the two cowboys walked back to the street and entered the El Camino Real. Smiling Smith came to them and asked what the trouble was about.

He shook his head gravely over the recital and asked Rowdy if he had any idea who might have done it.

"Do you remember me and Belton bein' here at the bar just about dark?" asked Rowdy.

"Well, I remember you bein' here, Rowdy."

"A feller came in and spoke to Belton," said Rowdy. "I can't remember who it was. He must have wanted to see Belton, or somebody wanted to see him. I remember Belton tellin' me that he'd be back pretty quick, but I was arguin' with the bartender, I think, and didn't pay much attention."

"'S funny they beat his head that way, instead of usin' a gun on him," said Smith.

"That's what makes it murder," said Rowdy. "They didn't want anybody to hear 'em."

"Well," observed Smith, "if he dies, nobody will ever know who done it."

"He's got a —— of a good chance to die," said Slim. "They sure hammered him to a point."

SLIM and Rowdy wandered down to the Trail saloon and stood out on the sidewalk. The place was crowded and noisy. The orchestra was hammering out a dance tune, which was almost drowned in the roar of conversation and laughter.

Arizony and Dirty came out, half-staggering, laughing. They caught sight of Slim and Rowdy and fell upon them gleefully.

"Welcome to the howlin' mult'tude," greeted Arizony. "'S a great big night. I just won a hun'red dollars on the wheel and I'm due to buy and buy big. Whatcha need in the way of interior decoration, gents?"

"Better put that hundred in yore boot and ride home," laughed Slim.

"Home ain't noways like this t'night," chuckled Dirty. "I'm forty to the good m'self. Whoo-ee-e-e!"

Dirty expanded his lungs and fairly screamed a war-whoop. From across the street another exuberant cowboy yelped back an answer, and punctuated it with a shot from his revolver.

"Yee-ow-w-w! Cowboy!" shrilled Arizony. "Hookum cow!"

Arizony's yelp had hardly echoed from across the street, when there came the unmistakable thud of a revolver shot, fired inside the saloon.

"Oh, oh!" grunted Slim quickly, as they turned toward the doorway. "That didn't sound so funny."

The crowd was milling around and several men crowded out of the doorway, questioning, wondering aloud.

"What happened?" asked Slim.

"I dunno," replied one of the men. "Trouble, I reckon."

They tried to get back into the saloon, but the crush was too heavy at the doorway. The noise had stilled considerably, and in a few moments two men crowded to the doorway and stepped outside.

"You know where he lives?" asked one of them.

"Who do yuh want?" asked Slim.

"The doctor."

"I know where he lives," said the other, and they started running toward the doctor's home.

Several more men came outside and Slim asked them for details.

"Buck Zaney just shot a gambler," said one of them.

"Yeah, and a doctor won't do him no good either," declared another. "He got hit plumb center."

"Yuh know what the trouble was?" asked Arizony.

"I dunno. He was workin' for Buck. Somebody said that Buck claimed the dealer was doin' the house dirt, and the gambler reached for a gun. It was that little, squint-eyed gambler, who banked the faro-game at the rear of the room. Little jigger with a scar on his cheek. I think they called him 'Inker.' "

"Buck was quick with his gun," said another drawlingly. "He shore got into action real quick. I heard him tell the gambler somethin' a little while before, and the gambler told him to go plumb to ——. Buck got mad and the gambler said for him to go ahead and fire him, if he didn't like the way he kept cases. Buck's a bad man to monkey with."

In a few minutes the doctor and sheriff came with the two men and went inside.

"Aw, this takes all the fun out of the evenin'," sighed Arizony. "Yuh can't feel wild and free just after a poor —— has cashed in his last chip. Let's go home, Dirty."

"Yo're an old woman," laughed Dirty. "That gambler wasn't nothin' to me. C'mon; let's go up to Smith's place."

They locked arms and went up the sidewalk toward the El Camino Real. Rowdy looked after them, a half-smile on his face. Rowdy seemed very thoughtful and paid little attention to Limpy Overton, who came out a few minutes later and said that the gambler was dead.

"Self-defense?" asked some one.

"Just exactly," said the sheriff. "He reached for a gun."

Some men came out through the doorway, carrying the body of the dead gambler. Slim and Rowdy moved aside and walked over to the hitch-rack.

"Let's go out to the ranch, Rowdy," suggested Slim. "The old man is plumb sick to see yuh. He ain't sore about yuh goin' over to the Bar-66; but he couldn't tell it to yuh today. C'mon, kid. And Clare's lookin' for yuh, too. Molly said that nobody could make her believe you was guilty."

Rowdy laughed a trifle sarcastically.

"All right, Slim. I swore I wouldn't, but I will. Fact of the matter is, I ain't got the price of a bed at the hotel."

"I'm —— glad of it," laughed Slim. "C'mon."

They mounted and rode out of town. The river had fallen enough for them to make a fairly easy ford.

"Fate's a queer thing," said Rowdy, looking back at the moonlit river. "I saved Skee Belton's life this mornin', only to have somebody try to kill him tonight. He could have gone out clean this mornin', Slim; but if he dies now, he leaves a murderer behind him."

"Yuh can't buck what's wrote in the Big Book," said Slim. "If yore name's written next to wagon-spokes, you'll never drown."

"I'd like a peek at that book," said Rowdy.

"Not me." Slim was emphatic. "I don't want to see what's comin' my way, y'betcha. If my name was opposite wagon-spokes I'd run m' fool head off every time I seen a wagon comin' down the road. Nossir, she's a good thing we don't know."

THEY rode in and stabled their horses. There was a dim light in Dynamite's room, but the rest of the house was in darkness. Slim lighted the lamp in the bunk-house and they sat down to roll a smoke.

Suddenly the door opened and Dynamite stood on the threshold staring at them.

"Rowdy, you came home?" Dynamite spoke softly, a note of wonder in his voice.

He stepped inside and closed the door, as if afraid of being seen from outside.

"Yeah, I came," nodded Rowdy.

Dynamite came over closer, looking from one to the other, and finally sat down on the edge of a bunk.

"You told him what we knew, didn't yuh, Slim?" he asked.

"The whole works," said Slim, and added, "There's been a lot of trouble in town tonight. Somebody dynamited the sheriff's office and Pattee escaped. Somebody tried to kill Belton, and Buck Zaney killed a gambler in a gun-fight."

"My gosh!" grunted Dynamite wonderingly. "You say that Cale Pattee escaped, Slim?"

"Y'betcha. Somebody blew out the side of the jail."

Dynamite inhaled a deep breath and reached for his pipe. A heavy load had been lifted from his mind. If Cale Pattee was at large, it was possible that he would keep away from the sheriff this time.

Rowdy nodded sleepily in his chair. He felt the need of a good sleep and a chance to do some real thinking. Dynamite smoked slowly; the first smoke he had enjoyed that day, while Slim yawned and stretched his long body.

"Better go to bed, Rowdy," said Slim. "You need sleep."

"Same to you," grinned Rowdy, and started to take off his boots.

"So Cale Pattee got away, eh?"

Dynamite rubbed the bowl of his pipe on his leg and sighed with satisfaction.

"I'll have to tell Clare. She's likely asleep, but I'll wake her up."

Rowdy looked at him, the boot half off in his hands.

"Say," he demanded, "do you think I held up that stage?"

Dynamite got to his feet and put away his pipe.

"Rowdy, we never asked yuh if yuh did," he replied. "All we know is what we heard."

Rowdy laughed bitterly and drew off his boots.

"Mebbe you was afraid I'd lie to yuh," he said, and added, "Mebbe I would."

"I never caught you in a lie yet," reminded his father. "If you say yuh didn't—yuh didn't, Rowdy."

"I hoped I wouldn't have to deny it," said Rowdy, getting to his feet and tossing his boots aside.

He had stepped to the center of the room and turned facing his father. He glanced at Slim, who was staring down at the floor. Dynamite was looking down, too.

"Look!" grunted Slim.

Rowdy glanced down at his own feet. A twenty-dollar bill was draped across his right foot, and more bills were oozing from the bottom of his wrinkled pants. Wonderingly he reached down and began taking them out.

He grasped the bottom of the pants-leg, opened it wide and a whole sheaf of bills cascaded out on to the floor. Rowdy rubbed his hand across his eyes and looked up at his father, who was backed against the door, staring at the money.

Slim was leaning forward, his mouth open, his right hand rumpling his hair. Then he said—

"Shake the other leg, Rowdy—you danged mint!"

Rowdy straightened up, a puzzled look on his face. He had no more idea than they of why the bills had been placed in his pants-leg.

"Some of your money got wet in the river," said Dynamite slowly. "It wasn't the best place to carry it."

And without waiting for a word of explanation he went out and closed the door behind him. Rowdy stared at the door for several moments, shook his head sadly and began picking up the money. There was more inside the pants-leg. He piled the bills up on the table and began counting them.

"My——!" snorted Slim. "I never knowed

there was that much money in the world."

"Eighteen hundred," said Rowdy softly. "Some of them hundred dollar bills got wet, but they'll be all right."

"I wish I had a lot of wet ones," said Slim. "I'd shore take a chance on dryin' 'em."

Rowdy laughed foolishly and sat down beside the table.

"Slim, it may sound like a —— lie; but I don't know a thing about that money," he declared.

"I betcha that's the truth," nodded Slim. "You'd be a darned fool to carry it in your boot. What's yore bet on it?"

"Not an idea in the world. Yuh see, I owe just that amount."

"You owe it? Who to, Rowdy?"

"Never mind, Slim. I'm goin' to bed right now and I'm goin' to put that money under my pillow. I'm plumb hazy right now, but I've got an idea who put it there."

"Some friend of yours?" queried Slim.

"Well," grinned Rowdy, as he shoved the money under his pillow, "well, he said he was, Slim. Good night."

"Good night," grunted Slim, as he blew out the light.

Down at the ford of the San Miguel, Arizony and Dirty rode out of the river and came toward the ranch. They had been riding silently for some time, when Dirty said—

"Arizony, didn't you say somethin' this evenin' about knowin' a little about dynamite?"

Arizony chuckled softly and eased himself in the saddle.

"Yeah, I reckon I said it," he replied. "And if anybody asks me the same question ag'in, I'll tell 'em that I know a —— of a lot about it."

"Education," observed Dirty seriously, "ain't always got from books. Yuh can read and be —— to yuh; but it takes practical experience to know that twelve sticks of——"

"Don't yell," advised Arizony. "This is a civilized country."

THE next morning Slim met Dynamite at the kitchen door and Dynamite drew him aside out of earshot of those inside the house. The ranch-owner's eyes were weary from lack of sleep. All night he had planned on what to do, but was still undecided.

"What are we goin' to do about Rowdy?" asked Dynamite. "I've schemed and schemed, but can't seem to work out any satisfactory idea. I wonder if he wouldn't leave the country, Slim."

"Well, I dunno."

Slim scratched his head thoughtfully.

"Mebbe he will and mebbe he won't, Dynamite."

"It's bound to come out pretty soon," declared Dynamite helplessly. "Of course it'll come out, even if he isn't here; but—I don't know what to do."

"It was kinda queer the way Cale Pattee got loose," observed Slim. "Now I wonder who in —— dynamited that place."

Dynamite looked knowingly at Slim, but shook his head slowly.

"I ain't sure," he said. "Clare told me what you went to town for last night, but, of course——"

Slim chuckled and shook his head quickly.

"Not me, old-timer. I was just ridin' in when it busted. It kinda looks to me like it was a deliberate jail-break. Somebody wanted Cale Pattee loose. But the blamed fool used enough dynamite to wreck the town, and it's only through the freak actions of the stuff that Pattee owes his life. They sure took a long chance of blowin' him plumb out of the country."

"Could Rowdy have had a hand in it, Slim?"

"He could; but I don't reckon he did. The sheriff had the same idea, I reckon."

"Well, I dunno."

Dynamite hitched up his belt and looked toward the bunk-house.

"Let's go and talk to Rowdy."

"Rowdy left before daylight."

"Left before daylight. Why, where do yuh reckon he went?"

"I dunno," said Slim. "Probably went to town. He seemed to be interested in that money yuh seen last night. He had eighteen hundred dollars."

"Eighteen hundred, eh?" Dynamite frowned heavily and looked away.

"Some of it got wet," grinned Slim.

"I wonder what he done with the rest, Slim."

Slim started to speak, but at that moment Clare and Molly came out through the kitchen and saw them.

"Dad, we're going for a ride," said Clare. "It is so nice and warm this morning and——"

"Riding?" Dynamite nodded. "Well, sure. Where yuh goin'?"

"Oh, just back into the hills," and then to Slim, "Have we got a good horse for Molly?"

"Yeah, I think so, Clare. That blaze-faced TJ horse ought to be a good one for her. He's plumb gentle, but he ain't dead on his feet. You ridin' Pancho?"

"Best horse on the range," laughed Clare. "You saddle that TJ horse and ride him a little, Slim. I don't want Molly to stand on her hands and pick daisies."

Slim laughed and started for the stable.

"I'll sure see that the blaze-face is plumb docile, Clare. Yuh want me to fork Pancho for yuh, too."

"I'll do my own riding," called Clare. "Bring 'em both up to the house, will you, Slim?"

Slim stopped and looked back at Clare.

"Say, I plumb forgot to ask yuh if yuh remembered what yuh said last night, Clare?"

Clare flushed and for a moment she had no answer. Molly laughed and flung an arm around Clare's shoulder.

"But you—you didn't make good, Slim," faltered Clare.

"Well—" Slim laughed and shrugged his shoulders—"it wasn't there. I'll have to try ag'in, I reckon—if the reward still stands good."

"It is still good," called Molly. "I will tell you——"

But Clare covered Molly's mouth with her cupped palm and Slim went away laughing at Clare's confusion.

Slim saddled both horses and rode the blazed-face TJ bay twice around the corral to see if a few days of idleness had put any foolish ideas into its head. Then he went to the house and helped the girls mount.

Molly had ridden a few times, but was by no means a horse-woman. Slim watched them climb into the hills and went to breakfast, where he found Dynamite, sitting gloomily at the table.

"We'll go to town after breakfast," said Dynamite. "I've got to see Rowdy."

"All right," said Slim. "I reckon we'll find him there."

About this time Rowdy was knocking on the front door of the doctor's home. The doctor came outside and softly closed the door.

"How's Belton this mornin'?" asked Rowdy.

"Well, that is hard to say," replied the doctor. "He is in no shape to see any one, but I have hopes of bringing him out all right."

"Is he conscious?"

"At short intervals; but not long enough to answer questions. He was badly battered."

"Anybody been to see him, doc?"

"The sheriff was here a while ago, but did not see him."

"Uh-huh. Well, I'm much obliged, doc. See yuh later."

Rowdy went to a restaurant and got some breakfast. Smiling Smith came into the restaurant and took a seat across the table from Rowdy.

"How yuh comin', Rowdy?" he grinned.

"Fine. Didja have a big play last night?"

"You bet we did. After the shootin' in the Trail we got more than our share. Did yuh hear if Belton died or not?"

"He's still alive, Smilin'. Who do yuh suppose hammered him up thataway?"

Smiling shook his head thoughtfully and gave his order to a waitress.

"I've wondered about it myself, Rowdy. They sure tried to kill him silently. I reckon they thought he was dead—and they'll wish he was, if he recognized 'em and gets well. He's a mean son-of-a-gun. I don't want Skee Belton on my trail."

"Where did he get his reputation, Smilin'?"

"Oh, I dunno. He was tried twice for rustlin' down in the Rainy River country, I've heard. He gunned up a couple of bad men down in Caliente and got run out of town when he linked the sheriff to a tree with his own handcuffs and pinned the sheriff's star to the seat of the sheriff's pants.

"He had a little cow-ranch of his own down in Texas, but his cows brought in too many twins and triplets and the other cow outfits chased him out. There's a lot of things they tell about him. I reckon he's just mean, Rowdy."

"Sounds like he was," admitted Rowdy. "I wonder what he came up here for, Smilin'?"

"Driftin', I suppose. I heard he left town, but I guess that wasn't so. Didn't you pull him out of the river?"

"Yeah. I guess he was pullin' out of the country; but came back to celebrate his San Miguel bath."

Rowdy dug down in his pocket and drew

out the bunch of bills. Smiling stopped eating to stare at the roll. He watched Rowdy count off eight hundred dollars and put the rest of the roll back in his pocket.

"That's what I owe you, Smilin'," said Rowdy easily, "and you can mark my name off your books."

"Well, all right, Rowdy." Smiling folded up the bills and put them in his vest pocket.

"Now, this ain't crimpin' you, is it, Rowdy?" he asked. "I just kinda got hasty that day, don'tcha know it?"

Rowdy patted the roll in his pocket and grinned at Smiling.

"Does that look like I was crimped, Smilin'?"

"No, it sure don't," laughed Smiling, getting to his feet. "Much obliged, Rowdy. Come on over and have a drink."

"Nope," Rowdy shook his head. "I'm just payin' my bills today, Smilin'; and I'm not thirsty. Thanks."

They separated at the door of the restaurant and Rowdy went down to the Trail saloon. Some of the games were still running and Buck Zaney was in his room at the rear of the gambling hall, checking up the night's business.

Rowdy inquired for Buck and was directed to the rear room.

Buck looked up quickly as Rowdy came in, but turned back to his books.

"Leave the door open," he grunted, as Rowdy started to close it. Buck had no desire to be shut off from the rest of the house in the company of Rowdy Denayer.

Rowdy stood easily beside the table and took out the roll of bills, which he tossed to the table beside Buck's elbow.

"Count 'em," he said shortly.

Buck squinted at Rowdy, as if trying to read his mind. Then he counted the bills carefully.

"One thousand dollars," he announced.

"That's what I owe yuh," said Rowdy. "We're even now, Buck."

"Oh, yeah," Buck seemed to suddenly remember that Rowdy owed him the money.

"You don't seem very happy over it," observed Rowdy.

"Well—" Buck stood up and shoved the money into his hip-pocket, a sarcastic grin curling his lips— "What do yuh reckon I ought to do—kiss yuh?"

It was like holding a match to gunpowder. The words were hardly out of Buck's mouth before Rowdy had knocked him back against the table with a slashing right hook to the mouth. The blow was so sudden that Buck had no chance to block it, and he cursed his own stupidity, as he covered up cleverly and backed around, trying to keep Rowdy from the door.

Rowdy had fallen into a natural crouch, his face white with anger. Buck laughed through his smashed lips.

"You angel-faced coyote pup!" he snarled. "I've been wantin' to pay you back for what you've done. You've still got a gun."

Rowdy dropped his hands and swiftly unbuckled the gun, letting it drop to the floor. He shoved it aside with his foot, and faced Buck again, his lips tight, body swaying gracefully.

The sounds of conflict had permeated the gambling-hall and a crowd of spectators had already gathered at the doorway. Rowdy was greatly outweighed by the bulky gambler, who knew the fighting game from practical experience. It was a lightweight against a light heavyweight, and the onlookers were already making long odds bets on the outcome.

"Pull it off out here," begged a gambler. "You ain't got room in there, Buck."

"Room enough," growled Buck. "I'm not takin' chances on this pretty cowboy runnin' away from me."

Buck knew the game. He covered cleverly and worked slowly into Rowdy, trying to force him against the wall. Buck knew that with his superior weight and strength he should smother Rowdy and hammer him to a pulp at close range.

But Rowdy knew this, too. In spite of Buck's defense he managed to whip in a stinging blow to Buck's forehead and stop Buck long enough to dance away from the corner.

"Reg'lar little she-kitten," applauded Buck. "Uses her claws."

Rowdy laughed wickedly and danced back to Buck. The laugh disarmed Buck. He was not used to fighting any one who laughed, and he got a right and left to his face before he realized what Rowdy was doing. Both blows left their mark.

"Well, the pretty kid has first blood, that's a cinch," observed one of the crowd. "He'll lick Buck at that rate."

Buck laughed angrily and tore into Rowdy, who met him half-way, much to Buck's surprize. For several moments they stood shoulder to shoulder and their arms worked like pistons. Then Rowdy went reeling back, gasping for breath. Buck staggered forward, shaking his head. Somehow his stomach was not as hard as it used to be. He could remember the time when he could stand a terrific blow around his waistline; but not now. He went toward Rowdy, pawing awkwardly. It hurt him to lift his hands very high, and he wondered if Rowdy knew this.

"Go to it, Buck!" called a gambler. "You almost had him that time."

Buck smiled grimly, and a moment later Rowdy wiped the smile away with a straight left to the mouth that turned Buck's head sidewise. The smash seemed to clear Buck's head. He cursed savagely and tore into Rowdy, swinging both arms.

Back they went into the wall with such force that they fairly rebounded. Rowdy's head hit the wall and for a moment after the rebound his eyes were blank, staring.

"Finish him, Buck!" yelled a gambler.

Buck was breathing with wide-open mouth. Rowdy had hit him in the stomach again and it seemed that all the air had been pumped out of the room. But he steadied himself and smashed at Rowdy's jaw.

And as the blow came, Rowdy's head was turning, and instead of the jaw it caught Rowdy beside the nose. It was not a mighty punch, but it was sufficient. Rowdy spun sidewise, caught himself and came back into Buck, his nose strangely twisted, his upper lip badly cut.

Buck was unprepared, hands hanging down, suffering from a very, very bad stomach-ache, his face bleeding, eye swollen. Rowdy seemed unhurt and there was a wide grin on his face, as he stepped in front of Buck, measuring the distance.

One solid punch and Buck Zaney would be finished. And Buck's arms would not do his bidding. Just behind Buck was a mirror, and Rowdy seemed to be looking into it, while the crowd waited breathlessly for the finishing punch, which did not come. Then Rowdy laughed loudly, joyously, turned away from Buck and picked up his gun and belt.

"Locoed, sure as ——!" grunted a spectator.

Buck was recovering slowly, but still wheezing, as Rowdy turned to the doorway and the crowd parted to let him through.

One of the men looked closely at Rowdy and said:

"Kid, you better see a doctor about that nose. She's plumb busted. And that lip needs a stitch or two."

"Doctor, ——!" snorted Rowdy.

"That nose will be crooked, I tell yuh," insisted the man.

"You —— fool, I've been wishin' for one all my life," laughed Rowdy, "and I'll lick the first doctor that tries to straighten it."

Rowdy went straight to the bar, while the crowd watched him, wonderingly. Buck had sat down in a chair, while one of the men went for water and towels to clean him up. He did not know yet just how the fight had come out—nor care.

"Everybody come up and have a drink on Broken Nose!" called Rowdy. "C'mon, you mavericks! Where's the cock-eyed pelican that called me a pretty boy?"

No one was willing to admit calling him that; but they were willing to drink with him. The bets had been declared off, although one gambler insisted that Buck was whipped. He had bet on Rowdy, at long odds and wanted his winnings.

Rowdy looked queer. His nose was undoubtedly broken, and was swelling badly. His upper lip was also puffed and bleeding; but Rowdy stood on the bar-rail and admired himself in the glass.

As the bartender was filling their varied orders Limpy Overton came in and looked around. Rowdy saw his reflection in the mirror and turned quickly.

"C'mon, Limpy," he called, "drink to a broken-nose, you sad-faced star-packer."

Limpy stared at him closely.

"Huh!" he grunted. "What happened to you?"

"Just out of the beauty shop," laughed Rowdy. "C'mon."

Limpy glanced at the others and indicated with a jerk of his head that he wanted to speak privately to Rowdy.

Rowdy nodded and left the bar, following the sheriff to the doorway.

The sheriff squinted at Rowdy's face, as if wondering what had happened, but decided not to ask about it again. He knew it did not pay to be too inquisitive with Rowdy.

"Well, whatcha want?" asked Rowdy impatiently.

"You paid Smilin' Smith some money this mornin', didn't yuh, Rowdy?"

Rowdy squinted thoughtfully.

"Well?"

"Eight hundred dollars in bills?"

"All right."

"Not hardly all right, Rowdy. The bank had the numbers of the bills stolen from the stage—and those were all stolen bills. I'll have to arrest——"

The sheriff's voice failed him. He couldn't talk about it, with Rowdy's gun against his middle.

Then Rowdy reached over, lifted the sheriff's gun from its holster and threw it into the middle of the street, where a mangy-looking hound dog tried to pick it up.

"You better stand still a while," advised Rowdy as he backed away swiftly toward the hitch-rack. "Take my advice and don't get nervous in the legs."

The sheriff swore softly and ducked inside the saloon, calling for some one to give him a gun. The crowd at the bar deserted their drinks to seek the cause of all this yelling for a gun, and some one gave the sheriff a six-shooter.

By this time Rowdy had mounted and spurred away from the hitch-rack. Into the street went the sheriff, swinging the heavy gun and yelling at Rowdy to stop.

But Rowdy was not thinking of doing any such foolish thing. The sheriff fairly danced with anger and began shooting. Dynamite Denayer and Slim Lorimer were riding in at the upper end of the street, and they separated swiftly when the sheriff's badly thrown lead whizzed around them.

Rowdy laughed loudly and turned in his saddle, gun in hand. His bullet struck the dirt about six feet short of the war-dancing sheriff, driving a handful of gravel into him, like the spray of shot from a duck-gun.

Then Rowdy spurred his horse into a swift run past his father and Slim, heading for the hills; while Limpy Overton cursed witheringly and tried to pick the gravel out of his anatomy.

It did not take the sheriff long to explain to the crowd just why Rowdy had made his getaway. Dynamite and Slim heard the sheriff tell about the stolen bills. He had been talking with Smiling Smith, who mentioned the fact that Rowdy had paid a gambling-bill. Investigation showed that the bills were of the serial numbers, which the bank had given to the sheriff's office.

The telling of the tale was done in the Trail saloon, and Buck, who had recovered sufficiently to appear, lost no time in producing the thousand dollars that Rowdy had paid him. The serial numbers showed that these bills were also part of the stage plunder.

Dynamite Denayer listened to these proofs of his son's guilt, but said nothing. He only turned away, when the men looked to him for an opinion. They respected Dynamite Denayer and were sorry for him.

"Well, yuh can't make nothin' else out of it," declared the sheriff, as if trying to excuse himself in Dynamite's eyes.

"There's the proofs of it, Denayer."

Dynamite turned wearily away. One of the men tried to tell him of the fight between Rowdy and Buck Zaney, but he would not listen.

The sheriff lost no time in making up a posse to take the trail of Rowdy. Slim heard Kelly's name mentioned several times, and he knew that the posse had something more in mind than to help the sheriff jail Rowdy.

They rode away about fifteen minutes later, twelve strong. Dynamite shaded his eyes and watched them swing into the hills. He turned to Slim and nodded toward the horses.

"We might as well go home, Slim."

"Uh-huh," nodded Slim. "We might as well. Rowdy's got a long start of 'em, and that tall roan could start even with that bunch of crow-baits and beat 'em three hundred yards in every mile."

"Oh, they'll get him, I suppose," said Dynamite wearily.

"Well—mebbe. They'll earn all they get of him, y'betcha."

As they rode back toward the ranch they noticed that the breeze had increased and that thunder-heads were piling up behind the northern hills.

"Goin' to rain," observed Slim, "and that won't help the posse none, Dynamite."

"It won't help Rowdy neither," replied Dynamite.

"He'll hole up somewhere, y'betcha." Slim squinted at the gathering storm. "He's likely under cover right now. I hope that Clare and Miss Holton didn't ride too danged far."

"Clare knows the hills," replied Dynamite.

"Which won't keep her dry, if the rain hits 'em," grinned Slim.

CLARE and Molly had ridden far back into the hills, climbing the high pinnacles, where they might get a sweeping view of the whole San Miguel Range. They had brought a lunch, which they ate at the head of a crooked cañon, where a spring bubbled out from under a flat rock.

It was a wonderland to the girl from the city. Clare had been raised in the San Miguel Hills and knew them as well as any of the cowpunchers; so was able to point out all the points of interest and to tell Molly the tales of the range-land.

From the Flat-rock spring they circled to the west.

"We'll have to go this way, unless we want to go back the way we came," explained Clare. "The Devil's Sluice cuts us off from going straight back. You remember that deep cañon we came around? That is the Devil's Sluice. It angles through half of the range. We'll circle the east end of it."

"Is it impossible to cross it?" asked Molly.

"Well, everybody says it is," smiled Clare, "but I know how to cross it. There's a way. I told dad about it one day and he thinks I'm joking—but I'm not."

Molly was not curious enough to ask for an explanation, and besides she was getting very tired. The big stock-saddle was too large for her, and the continuous up-and-down travel had made her wonder if there was any flat ground in the world.

A fresh breeze struck them as they mounted a ridge and Clare drew rein to stare at the thunder-heads, which were piling up to the left of them.

"Is it a storm?" queried Molly, riding up beside her.

"You bet it's a storm. Gee whiz!" Molly turned and looked southward.

"It will hit us before we can make the circle, too, Molly. If we could go straight back—say—" Clare turned and looked at Molly—"will you follow me through the Devil's Sluice?"

"Why, I—I suppose so," faltered Molly. "Is it so bad?"

"No. It looks bad though. That blaz-faced horse seems to *sabe* his feet pretty well; so let's try it. We might beat the storm that way, and, anyway, we'll get soaked if we go around."

And without any further argument, Clare turned her horse around and led the way straight south. Both horses seemed to sense the need of going home and broke into a gallop as soon as they struck the downward slope of the hills.

It was fairly open going and Clare led the way, swinging around the heads of the cañons, cutting sharply along the sides of the hills, always keeping as near as possible to a straight line southward.

The sky had grown dark and the wind was whipping sharply across the hills when Clare drew up at the rim of the deep cañon. It was about a quarter of a mile from rim to rim and the sides were precipitous. As far as the eye could see there was no way of crossing it.

Clare looked it over, swung to the left and led the way several hundred yards to where a line of pine-trees extended, almost in single-file, from over the rim. It was like a file of plumed Indians, climbing out of the cañon, in that darkening light.

Clare swung down, tightened the cinch of her saddle and came over to Molly, where she performed the same operation.

"Just forget to look down," advised Clare. "Give that blaze-face his head. If you want to, shut your eyes."

She swung back into her saddle and spurred down past the line of pines. Molly followed, already frightened, and pulled up at the brink. Clare was forcing her horse to start down what appeared to be an old game trail.

It was narrow and looked none too secure, but Clare's horse started down without much urging. Molly watched her pass around the first turn, the hoofs of her horse sinking into the soft dirt of the trail.

Molly tried to urge her horse to follow, but the blaze-face did not seem to relish the idea. Clare had passed out of sight and Molly realized that it would be impossible for her to turn and come back before reaching the bottom of the cañon.

A rumble of thunder, like the roll of a distant drum, came to her ears, and the wind roared dismally through the pines. Molly suddenly realized that she was all alone in a mighty big world, and the realization frightened her. She turned the horse around and rode back the way they had come, until she struck the top of the ridge.

She knew the general direction of the ranch and realized that she would have to circle the Devil's Sluice in order to reach there. The northern hills were blotted out in the coming storm, and Molly knew that it would reach her long before she could even circle the Sluice; but it was her only way out.

Jagged streaks of lightning were spreading a pattern on the black curtain in the north, and the thunder was almost a continuous roll now. The blaze-face snorted wildly and tried to run, but Molly managed to keep a tight rein, in spite of her weariness.

It grew darker and darker and there seemed no end to the Devil's Sluice. Then the storm broke in real earnest and there was nothing but a whirling blackness—and rain. The lightning only served to make it darker after each flash, and Molly lost all sense of direction.

The horse picked its way carefully, mile after mile. Up-hill and down-hill they went, while the thunder and lightning passed on, leaving nothing but blackness and drizzling rain. Molly swayed in the saddle and clung to the saddle-horn for support. She had given up all hopes of reaching the ranch before daylight. In fact, she had almost forgotten that such a place existed. The rain was cold and the wind had numbed her until she was devoid of feeling.

They were going down-hill now. A wet branch slapped her across the face and other branches seemed to clutch at her wet clothes. Then the horse stopped. She swayed in the saddle and almost fell off the horse. She blinked sleepily. Just beyond her was what seemed to be a small window, and she could see a flickering light, like the dying embers of an open fire.

She slid out of the saddle and fell flat on the wet ground, while the horse jerked back with a snort of fright. Molly did not move for several moments. She got to her hands and knees and remained in that position for a while, before struggling to her feet.

As she threw out a hand to steady herself she grasped the corner of a log building. Moving over carefully she managed to brace herself and edge along to where her hands came in contact with the crude latch of the door.

As she fumbled with it, leaning her weight against the door, it suddenly opened and she fell full-length inside the cabin. A breath of warm air seemed to envelop her and she looked up.

There was some one looking down at her, but she could not see who it was. The figure vanished and a moment later a match was lighted. She closed her eyes for a moment and then looked up at Rowdy Denayer, who was staring down at her, with a candle in his hand.

She wanted to laugh, but her face was too numb. Rowdy looked funny. His nose was twice its size and his upper lip seemed bulged, as if he was holding a marble between his teeth and lip.

"For ——'s sake; where did you come from?" he asked.

She tried to talk, but only mumbled. He placed the candle in the neck of a bottle on the table, picked her up and put her in a crude chair before the fireplace. She nodded foolishly at him, as he piled more wood on the fire. The dancing flames lighted up the little cabin and threw grotesque shadows on the walls. Rowdy leaned against the wall near the fire and looked at her.

"Feelin' better?" he asked.

Molly nodded.

"Where's Clare?" he asked.

"Home."

Molly's voice was like the croak of a raven. She laughed at the sound of it.

"Clare crossed the Devil's Sluice."

"She did? What for?"

"To beat the storm. I—I was afraid. Got lost."

Rowdy laughed softly.

"You sure took a wide circle, Miss Holton. I dunno how in the —— you ever found this place."

"The horse found it. Can I find my way home from here?"

"Not tonight. I'd hate to try it myself."

The rain rattled on the shake-covered roof and the wind howled through the trees. The fire had warmed the room, and Molly's eyes closed in spite of her efforts to keep awake.

"Gosh, yo're wet!" exclaimed Rowdy. "Wish I had some dry clothes for yuh. You sure can't spend the night in them wet rags."

There was one bunk in the cabin, spread with blankets. Rowdy studied for a few moments and arrived at a decision.

"I'll tell yuh what we'll do, Miss Holton. I'll go outside while you undress and go to bed. Then I'll dry yore clothes in front of the fire."

"No, do not do that, Mr. Denayer. If I sit here long enough——"

"You'll have a —— fine case of pneumonia. I'm goin' out and take care of yore horse, while you take off every bit of yore clothes. Stack 'em on the chair. I'll be at the door and all yuh got to do is yell when yo're ready."

He walked out into the storm and shut the door behind him. Molly disrobed as swiftly as possible and crawled in between the blankets. The bunk was built of small poles and covered with a thin layer of fir-boughs, which made it anything but a downy couch; but the warm blankets felt much better than her rain-soaked clothes.

Suddenly the door swung open. Molly did not look up, but wondered that Rowdy would come in unbidden. She heard some one whisper a question and lifted her head. There were two people standing in the doorway, letting in a swirl of rain and wind.

One of them came closer and she could see that it was Cale Pattee. He stopped at sight of her, gun in hand. Water was running off the brim of his wide hat and dripping on the floor. The other person moved in beside him, and in the light of the candle Molly could see that it was Agnes Pattee, dressed in cowboy garb.

"It's a girl," Pattee said hoarsely. "Now what——"

He whirled quickly, his question unspoken. Rowdy stood in the doorway behind them, covering them both with his gun. For several moments they stared at each other, and Rowdy laughed.

"Howdy, folks," he said slowly. "Yuh kinda scared me for a moment."

"Yeah?" grunted Pattee. "Hello, Rowdy. Whatcha doin' here?"

"Holed up for a while," smiled Rowdy. "Quite a storm we had, eh?"

Agnes had stepped over where she could see Molly. She looked at Molly's wet clothes and moved over to the front of the fireplace.

"We didn't expect to find anybody here," said Pattee. "The sheriff and his gang went pesticatin' today; so I came up here. Agnes insisted on comin' along."

"They were after me," said Rowdy. "I headed for this place and got here just ahead of the storm."

"What happened to start 'em after you?"

Rowdy told of the stolen money and of his fight and getaway.

"It sure is a mixup," agreed Pattee thoughtfully.

"Now, about that knife," said Rowdy. "If I had that knife at the time of the robbery, why did you hide out, Cale? Was you protectin' me?"

"Not exactly, Rowdy. I didn't know you had it until after I got away from the sheriff. I forgot about loaning it to you. It would have been a weak excuse, anyway."

"Well, I forgot about havin' it," said Rowdy.

"Did you dynamite the jail?" asked Pattee curiously.

Rowdy shook his head.

"No, I didn't have anythin' to do with that, Cale. It's a wonder you didn't get killed."

"Yeah, it sure is. It knocked me down. I walked out, looked around and walked back to the ranch. The sheriff almost fell over me. I'll bet he's sore."

"He's sore enough, that's a cinch," laughed Rowdy. "But how is it all going to end, Cale? We can't dodge 'em all our life. If we give up, they'll lynch us both; if we keep dodgin', they'll nail us sooner or later."

"She's a sweet outlook, sure enough," admitted Pattee.

"Did this woman make a getaway with you?" Agnes turned and spoke directly to Rowdy.

"No," he replied. "She just arrived a little while ago."

He turned to Molly and said—

"You have met these folks, haven't yuh, Miss Holton?"

"Why, yes, I—I think so. Anyway, they were at the Golden Wedding that night."

"She just arrived a while ago?" queried Agnes. "In the storm?"

"Yes, in the storm," said Rowdy slowly.

"All alone?"

"Sure."

"That's funny."

Agnes turned and looked into the fire.

"I don't know how she could find her way here alone. It is hard to find, even if you know it as well as we do. Who showed her the way?"

"No one, Agnes. She got lost in the storm and the horse brought her here."

Agnes laughed shortly and shook her head, as if she did not believe.

"I got lost," said Molly softly. "Clare and I were out riding, but got separated. The horse brought me here in the storm."

"All right," said Agnes coldly. "It's a good story, if you both stick to it."

"You do not believe me?" asked Molly wonderingly.

Agnes turned her back on Molly and looked intently at Rowdy.

"What happened to your face?" she asked.

Rowdy grinned and patted his swollen nose.

"I had it altered," he said. "That nose will be crooked and I'll have a scar on my lip."

"Always?" queried Agnes.

"You bet."

Agnes turned back to the fire and Molly noticed that she was crying. Rowdy saw her too, and put his hand on her shoulder.

"Whatsa matter with you, Agnes?" he asked.

She shook off his hand and got to her feet. He tried to detain her, but she shoved him aside and went to the door.

"I'm going home, dad," she told her father.

"Going home—tonight?"

Rowdy laughed and shook his head.

"Not in this storm, Agnes."

"Do you think you can stop me?" she asked angrily.

"You stay here," ordered her father. "You——"

But she slipped out into the storm and slammed the door behind her. Cale Pattee ran to the door and went out into the storm, but came back in a few moments.

"She's gone," he said softly. "She'll make it all right. The storm is breaking pretty fast."

Rowdy nodded and sat down in front of the fire, while Cale Pattee stretched out on the floor on a blanket. Molly slept fitfully through the night, and each time she awoke Rowdy was still awake, staring into the little fire. Cale Pattee snored loudly, as if he hadn't a care in the world.

It was just at daylight that Rowdy called to Molly and pointed to her clothes.

"We'll be outside," he said. "Dress as quick as you can and we'll head for the ranch."

The storm had drifted away, but the trees and foliage still dripped water. Rowdy had both horses at the door and helped Molly into the saddle. As far as she could see, they were down in a heavily wooded cañon, and she marveled that the horse should have been able to find the place in the storm.

Pattee stood in the cabin door and watched them ride up through the timber. Rowdy was very quiet and watchful, as they rode out at the upper end of the cañon and on to open ground. To Molly there was something familiar about this spot, and she suddenly realized that it was the cañon of the Flat Rock.

She laughed foolishly and Rowdy turned quickly.

"This is where Clare and I ate our lunch," she explained. "I must have ridden in a circle in the wrong direction."

"Yeah," he said dryly. "You sure did."

He led the way along the brink of the cañon, scanning the country below them, as if looking for some one. Suddenly he jerked up his horse and swore softly. Far below them a file of horsemen were coming up the bottom of the cañon.

"I was scared of that," he said aloud. "Limpy's gang either followed Cale's tracks or back-tracked Agnes. That danged rain made it easy."

"Will they find Mr. Pattee?" asked Molly anxiously.

"They're a danged poor posse if they don't. There's five of 'em and they're headin' for the cabin."

The five men were out in plain sight now. Rowdy drew his six-shooter and turned to Molly.

"Throw me yore reins."

"What do you—?" she began, but he spurred over to her, flipped the reins over the horse's head and turned back to the rim of the cañon.

"I dunno how that blaze-face stands for shootin'," he said, as he fired a shot in the general direction of the five riders below them. The blaze-face jerked back a little and snorted, but did not seem unfamiliar to pistol shooting.

For several moments the five men kept in single-file. As Rowdy fired again they jerked up, seemed to move into a compact mass and then scattered like a covey of quail.

Rowdy emptied his gun, but did not seem to be trying to hit any of them. In fact, none of them was in sight now. He reloaded and fired several more shots.

"I think that Cale can hear it," he said, half to himself. "Anyway, I'll keep Limpy guessin' for a while."

He laughed softly and began reloading.

Molly glanced around. Behind them, on the far ridge of a hill, several horsemen had come into view, silhouetted against the sky.

"There are some more men," she said to Rowdy, who turned quickly, staring at them.

"My gosh, there's the rest of the posse!" he exploded, as he threw the reins back over her horse's head.

"They're too —— close for comfort, too. C'mon."

Rowdy started on along the rim of the cañon, hoping against hope that they might have been unseen against the heavy foliage; but he was doomed to disappointment when the riders swung off the hill in their direction.

"You stay here," he told Molly. "They'll see that you get home safely."

"I'm going with you," she said firmly. "Go ahead."

They spurred into a gallop, with Rowdy's long-legged roan taking the lead. It was a wild ride, with the posse spreading out fan-wise behind them, taking no chances on their quarry doubling back on them.

Rowdy noticed that two of the riders, mounted on fast horses, were bearing swiftly to the right. He swore softly and gritted his teeth. They were cutting him off from going around the west end of the Devil's Sluice, while the rest of the posse were swinging to the left, cutting down the distance to the east end of the Sluice, but lagging enough to prevent them from doubling back.

Rowdy looked back at Molly. The blaze-face was running strong, following the roan's lead, while Molly clung to the saddle-horn like a burr, her lips shut tight, hair flowing in the wind.

And it was not easy traveling for the horses. The ground was soft from the rain and they went fetlock-deep at every stride on the down-hill running. Both horses were blowing hard from traveling at top speed, and Rowdy drew up a little to allow Molly to reach him.

"They're trappin' us!" he called to her. "Devil's Sluice just ahead. I didn't have sense enough to think about it."

Molly heard enough to know that their escape had been cut off. The two horses were galloping together now, and she suddenly noticed the long single-file of pine-trees just beyond them. It was the place where Clare had gone into the deep cañon.

"There's where Clare crossed it!" she called, and her voice sounded weak in the rush of their horses.

"Are yuh sure?" asked Rowdy, a note of hope in his voice.

"Straight ahead," she called, "just this side of the trees."

The posse had passed out of sight now, but Rowdy knew that they were only completing the trap. He spurred in ahead and raced to the edge of the cañon, where he drew up.

"Down there!" called Molly, pointing at the little trail.

Rowdy looked around, his lips set in a thin line.

"Miss Holton, you better stay up here. That trail is as slick as soft-soap, but I'm goin' down. They won't hurt you."

"Go ahead," she said firmly. "I'm not afraid."

Rowdy spurred down the trail and she followed him. The blaze-face was reluctant at first, but a little urging sent him down the narrow pathway.

After the first few yards, Molly closed her eyes. Rowdy's horse was skidding badly and she could not bear to watch it. To her, it did not seem that a goat could negotiate that trail, where a single misstep would mean that horse and rider would slide and fall into the depths of the Sluice.

Far below her she had seen the pointed tops of tall trees; and at every sway of her horse she felt that they were reaching up at her. Then she heard Rowdy's cool voice saying:

"Just take it easy, Miss Holton. Let the horse go his own gait."

It seemed to her that they had traveled for hours, when Rowdy spoke again:

"Better shut your eyes here, Miss Holton. Don't get scared—and give your horse his head."

Molly tried to obey him, tried to keep her eyes shut; but her horse was sliding straight down the hill, sitting on its rump, and her eyes opened in spite of his warning.

Suddenly the horse floundered sidewise, clawed wildly for a moment at the brink of a straight-away drop, and circled the side of the hill again behind Rowdy's roan.

"Yuh can open yore eyes now," yelled Rowdy. "Anybody that follows us will need a parachute, 'cause our back trail has all slid off into the Sluice."

They rode out on to an open pinnacle and stopped. About a hundred feet below them was the bottom of the cañon, and it was an easy matter to negotiate the rest of the distance.

"If we can only find the way out the other side," said Rowdy dubiously. "The rain has wiped out the tracks made by Clare's horse. Anyway," he grinned, "we've shook the posse off our trail. They'll never be able to follow us down here, because we skidded away all the trail behind us."

"I hope that no one ever tries to come down there again," said Molly nervously, "I was a—a——"

Came the hiss and thud of a striking bullet, and Molly's horse dropped in a shuddering heap, throwing her out of the saddle on the up-hill side. And from back on the high rim of the cañon came the echoing report of a rifle-shot.

Rowdy swung off his horse and helped Molly back to her feet. She was unhurt, but badly frightened. Another bullet hissed over their heads and Rowdy instinctively ducked.

"Get on my horse!" he snapped "They're shooting at us from the rim."

He held the horse while she mounted, and then climbed up behind her. Bullets were passing over them, the men shooting high from their extreme elevation, but Rowdy knew that sooner or later they would improve their aim.

He spurred the horse sharply down the hill, and his added weight on the horse's rump was all that prevented them from somersaulting on the way down. They struck the bottom in a slide of rubble and headed into the brush, which screened them from the posse.

"That's the joy of bein' an outlaw," said Rowdy seriously, as they rode up through the brush, keeping out of sight of the posse at the rim of the cañon.

"Well," said Molly, her face still white from the shock of having her horse shot from under her, "well, it—it is thrilling, to say the least."

"Especially when there's a rope waitin' for yuh at the end of the trail," added Rowdy.

"A rope?" Molly did not seem to understand.

"Yeah—a hangman's rope."

"Why—why they would not hang you, would they?"

"Wouldn't they?"

Rowdy laughed shortly and squinted back toward the top of the cañon.

"I'm not takin' any chances."

"But you are innocent."

"Yeah, that's a fine thought."

"You can prove it, can't you?"

"Mebbe—to a judge and jury. But that fool posse is liable to get so enthusiastic that they'd forget. Any old time they shoot at yuh—their mind is made up."

"But what can you do?" she demanded. "You cannot hide in the hills forever."

Rowdy shook his head.

"No, I can't do that either. I reckon it's comin' to a showdown. They think that Pattee and me are both guilty, yuh see. I'm scared that they've caught him already, and they might not bring him back to town; so I'm goin' to town, hopin' that they have brought him in alive."

"And they will capture you, too," Molly protested.

"Sure. Pattee is innocent, though."

"You are innocent, too."

"Well, there's got to be somebody guilty. C'mon, bronc."

They crossed the bottom of the cañon and found the spot where Clare had started up the opposite side the night before. Rowdy dismounted and led the horse up the faint trail. The posse had left the opposite side.

The going was almost as bad as it had been on the other side, but climbing was less dangerous than going down and they reached the top in safety. They rested at the top and scanned the country. It would take some time for the posse to circle the Sluice; so they felt reasonably safe for a while.

"I think you are very foolish to go to town," declared Molly.

"Yeah?"

Rowdy grinned faintly and wiped his muddy boots on a stack of pine-needles.

"Well, mebbe, it is, Miss Holton. Yuh see, I'm always doin' fool things. I didn't realize until just lately what a fool I have been. Fate kinda wished a face on to me that didn't fit, don'tcha know it?

"No, I'm not sensitive about it now," Rowdy grinned and felt of his misshapen nose and scarred lip. "There ain't nothin' left to feel sensitive about. I kinda ran hog-wild with folks that I thought was makin' fun of my looks.

"I've got myself into a —— of a jackpot now, and I'll be as lucky as a horseshoe if I don't hang for it. I got mad at you down at the ford the mornin' yuh came, and I want yuh to forgive me for actin' the way I did. I'm just plumb or'nary, I reckon."

"Why, certainly, I will forgive you, Rowdy. I wish you would call me Molly. We certainly——"

"Yes'm, we've been introduced a-plenty," he grinned, as he swung on behind the saddle. "We better hit the grit, Molly."

They started down across the hills, going straight toward the ranch, when three riders came into view. It was Clare, Arizony and Slim, riding swiftly up the slope.

"Good lord!" panted Clare. "Where have you been, Molly? We didn't know what happened to you. I got frightened when I was at the bottom of the Sluice. You did not come down, and I couldn't turn around."

"I got lost," laughed Molly. "I was afraid to follow you, Clare. And my horse took me to Rowdy's cabin in the storm."

Slim squinted questioningly at Rowdy.

"The little cabin in Flat-Rock Cañon," said Rowdy, looking back anxiously.

"Will one of you folks double with Molly, Slim? The posse is after me and I've got to fade out *pronto*."

"And where yuh goin'?" queried Arizony.

"Range City."

"Of all the danged fools," pronounced Arizony. "They'll hang yuh too high to skin, Rowdy."

"All right," nodded Rowdy as he helped Molly dismount.

"They'll hang me just as high right here, if I don't start movin'. Where's dad?"

"Him and Dirty circled the west end of the Sluice. They've likely run into the posse by this time," said Clare.

Rowdy tightened his cinch and swung back into the saddle.

"Well, that might stop 'em for a few minutes," he grinned. "I'm headin' for town, if anybody wants to know. Molly will tell yuh all the things that happened, and I want to thank yuh for findin' that place to cross the Sluice, Clare. *Adios*."

They watched Rowdy disappear over the crest of the next hill, and gathered around Molly to hear her story, which she told in a few words.

"I'll betcha they got Pattee," said Arizony mournfully.

Slim's lips had shut tight as Molly told of the posse shooting her horse.

"They'll pay for that blaze-face," he declared, "and I want to see the jasper that fired the shot. That ain't law nor justice, that ain't. A man is innocent until the jury proves him guilty, y'betcha."

Slim was helping Molly into his saddle when part of the posse, with Dynamite and Dirty, came into sight. Baldy Benson, the deputy sheriff, was leading them. They drew up and looked over the people from the T-Anchor-Bar.

"Run out of horses, Lorimer?" asked Baldy, as he noticed that Slim intended riding behind Molly.

"Yuh might look at it thataway, Baldy," admitted Slim. "Anythin' might happen with you and yore gang loose in the hills."

"Meanin' which?" queried Baldy coldly.

"Promiscuous shootin', Baldy."

"Thasso?" Baldy looked around at his men, a half-grin on his face.

Slim stepped away from his horse and drew closer to Baldy.

"Yeah, that's what I said, you bat-eared jug-head. You shot the young lady's horse —one of yuh; and I'm askin' yuh which one done it."

Baldy's eyes narrowed and his lips shut tightly for a moment. He did not like the appellation at all. Baldy's ears did flare a trifle. One of the posse snickered audibly.

"Was the young lady one of the two riders that went into the Sluice?" asked Baldy, trying hard to keep the angry quiver out of his voice.

"Yeah," replied Slim. "Is that why yuh shot at her? Is it ag'in' the law to ride into the Sluice, Baldy?"

"Baldy's makin' his own laws," said Arizony.

Baldy squinted sidewise at Arizony, but turned back to Slim.

"One of them riders was Rowdy Denayer," he said. "We had him cinched, until he went over the edge. How in —— he ever got down alive is more than I can see."

"Which don't tell me who shot that horse," reminded Slim.

"No, and you'll never know," declared Baldy. "We don't know. We was all shootin' at 'em."

Slim rubbed his nose and turned back to his horse.

"Yuh might tell us which way Rowdy went," said Baldy, and added quickly, "but we know yuh won't."

"Then save yore breath," snapped Slim. "I'll tell yuh this much, Baldy: I'm ag'in' yuh."

"Meanin' just about what, Lorimer?"

"Just that much."

"I ante into the same pot," declared Arizony meaningly.

"Lemme in, cowboy," begged Dirty Deal. "I'm honin' for action."

"Pick yore own flowers," said Baldy angrily, lifting his reins.

They were about to start on when the rest of the posse, with Cale Pattee roped to his saddle, came into view. Limpy Overton was jubilant over the capture, and listened eagerly while Baldy told of the pursuit of Rowdy; but shook his head and looked at the T-Anchor-Bar crowd.

"No, we didn't help him, Limpy," said Slim. "He didn't need our help to out-guess Baldy Benson and his farm and fireside outfit; but from now on, we're helpin' him."

"The —— you are!" snorted the sheriff.

"Ladies present," reminded Dirty.

Limpy snorted and led his men away toward town, while Slim mounted behind Molly and they started for the ranch.

"Which way did Rowdy go?" asked Dynamite.

"To town—the darned fool!" exploded Arizony. "He ain't got a Chinaman's chance down there."

"Well, he might have," observed Slim quickly. "We'll get there almost as soon as the posse does—me and you and Dirty."

"Slim, please don't do anything rash," begged Dynamite. "God knows we're in a bad enough fix without more trouble. If they get Rowdy, he'll have a fair trial."

"Like —— he will!" exploded Arizony. "Range City has been layin' low, but they're sure worked up over that killin'. If Kelly was half as popular before he got killed as he has been since, he'd 'a' been elected king, or somethin' like that."

"We won't do anythin' rash," said Dirty, "but we seem to have been called to kinda set on the front row."

"Rowdy is sorry over the way he has acted," offered Molly. "He realizes what a mess he has made of things, and I know he will do different from now on."

"He sure will," said Slim, "if some fool miracle don't happen."

* * *

ROWDY went past the ranch and down to the river. The recent rain had little effect on it, although the water was still very muddy. He followed the banks for about a mile to a spot where the flood waters had broken the river into several channels, leaving the ground between strewed with débris and yellow mud. He rode back and forth across these channels, searching for the remains of Skee Belton's horse.

He found the carcasses of several ill-fated steers, which had foolishly tried to cross the river, and after a long search he found the horse, wedged in a pile of drift, high and dry out of the river.

The saddle had been badly torn and battered, but was still cinched to the remains; and what was of more value, Belton's belongings were still tied to the cantle of the saddle. Rowdy cut the shrunken strings, took the slicker-wrapped bundle under his arm and crossed to the town side, where he opened it up and examined the contents. There was a pair of socks, a bottle of whisky and a bundle of water-soaked currency, which, on account of its condition, Rowdy was unable to count.

There was no doubt in Rowdy's mind that Skee Belton was the man who held up the stage. There was far too much money in that bundle for Belton to have acquired it honestly.

"And he ain't in no shape to talk about it, I reckon," mused Rowdy sadly. "If he's dead, I ain't got a chance in the world."

Rowdy mounted and rode toward Range City, but traveling in a circle to come in at the rear of the doctor's home. He made the circle wide enough that no one in the town might see him and dismounted at the doctor's rear gate. He had put the bundle of currency inside his shirt, but had left the socks and whisky on the river-bank.

The doctor met him at the door, and Rowdy could see that this worthy practitioner was surprized to see him. He invited Rowdy inside and waited for him to announce his reasons for the visit.

"How's Belton?" queried Rowdy anxiously.

"Still in bed." The doctor nodded toward the next room.

"Know anythin'?" asked Rowdy.

"At times. He has been conscious several times, but it does not seem to last long."

"Talk any, doc?"

"Well, not much."

The doctor pursed his lips and looked very professional.

"He realizes that he has been hurt, I think. Talks quite a lot about some friend. I do not understand what he means."

Rowdy leaned on the table and looked straight at the doctor, as he said:

"Doc, you know the fix I'm in, don'tcha?"

"Yes, I have heard some talk about you."

"It's a hangin' matter, doc. Can'tcha fix Belton up so he can talk? He's the one that done it."

"Belton held up the stage?"

"Yeah."

"But I can not make him talk. If you are sure of this, the trial could surely be delayed until he is able to talk."

"Trial? Say, doc, there won't be no trial. Can't I see Belton?"

The doctor studied the situation for a while.

"I guess you can see him, Denayer. Perhaps it will do no harm, but I am sure it will do no good. Come this way."

The doctor opened the door of the bedroom and stepped aside for Rowdy to enter. The room had been darkened and there was a strong odor of medicine. The window was half-open and the curtain was billowing in the slight breeze.

Rowdy stopped and stared at the bed. The clothing had been flung on to the floor, but there was no sign of the patient. The doctor was staring past Rowdy, and now he stepped ahead and looked around, as if expecting to see Skee Belton perched on the picture rail.

"Why—why, he is not here!" he blurted. "I—I——"

He ran to the window and looked out. After a moment he drew back and went to the dresser, where he opened the top drawer and looked inside.

"His cartridge-belt and gun are also gone," he announced vacantly. "My ——, the man is crazy! Why, he is not at all responsible for what he might do, I tell you."

"He ain't no worse than a lot of us, doc," said Rowdy seriously, and turned back to the door. "He likely got his mind back and decided to vamoose. Much obliged."

Rowdy walked out of the house, leaving the excited doctor voicing his wonder to the skies, and went back to his horse. He mounted slowly and debated on his next move. It would do him little good to try and shove the guilt upon Skee Belton; if Skee Belton had left the country.

As he sat there in the shade of a gnarled cottonwood he could see the posse riding into town, strung out almost in single-file, their horses wearily kicking up the yellow dust. Rowdy could see that the second rider in the line was Cale Pattee.

More riders were coming into town from the same direction. Three riders, to be exact, and they were coming at a swift gallop. It was Slim Lorimer, Arizony Allen and Dirty Deal. Rowdy straightened in his saddle and started toward the street. He felt that his bunkies from the T-Anchor-Bar were there to fight for a square deal; and he knew that every one of them was capable of doing a man-sized job of fighting.

Another rider came into view—Agnes Pattee. Rowdy surmised that Agnes had watched for the posse and was coming in to do her little bit.

"She's goin' to be a big day," mused Rowdy, as he dismounted at the rear of a restaurant and tied his horse to a fence.

The posse had stopped in front of the sheriff's wrecked office, and there seemed to be a difference of opinion as to the disposition of the prisoner. Range City had all moved into the street, and Limpy Overton and Baldy Benson were on the defensive, when Slim, Arizony and Dirty rode in.

Limpy and Baldy had Pattee off his horse and on the sidewalk; but seemed helpless to go any farther, as the crowd had them surrounded. Agnes Pattee rode in and tried to go to her father, but a couple of cowboys held her back none too gently.

Uncle Johnny Marsh was trying to argue for law and order in the case, but his voice seemed to influence them very little. Uncle Johnny mopped his brow and begged them to "have a little sense."

"Let the law handle it, boys," he argued. "We ain't never had a lynchin' around here, and this ain't no time to begin."

"This ain't no case for the law," yelled a cowboy, whose perspective was badly bent by whisky. "This is a case for men to handle."

"Then let men handle it," retorted Uncle Johnny. "You box-headed punchers go back to yore liquor and let the men handle this case."

Some of the audience laughed, but most of them were serious. Slim shoved his way to a spot beside Uncle Johnny and faced the crowd.

"This talk of lynchin' is foolish," he declared. "You don't even know that Pattee is guilty. What one of yuh can swear that Pattee pulled that job? Not a —— one of yuh."

"Where do you get in on this?" demanded one of Buck Zaney's gamblers.

"That's right," laughed a cowboy; "Slim's talkin' for the T-Anchor-Bar. The boot is pinchin' him, boys."

The cowboy laughed uproariously and the next moment he was lying in the dust with Arizony standing over him. The cowboy tried to draw a gun, and Arizony kicked it out of his hand.

"Hookum cow!" chortled Dirty. "That's makin' 'em suffer for learnin' to talk smart-like. Next li'l gentleman speak up."

"This ain't gettin' us nowhere," declared a cattleman. "All the fightin' and smart talk in the world ain't goin' to dispose of a cowardly murder."

"And all yore talkin' ain't goin' to cause another one," said Slim. "It'll be murder if you hang Cale Pattee."

"And more than that," said Arizony ominously, "there'll be a lot of killin' precedin' the murder."

"Yuh better all go home and let the law handle it," said Limpy.

"Law!" snorted a cattleman. "We'll wait a month or two before there's a session of court, and some smart lawyer will clear him. The law is too —— slow for me."

"Mebbe it's a good thing for you that it is," said Slim meaningly.

The cattleman shoved his way to the front and faced Slim. He was a tall, long-mustached person, with a bad cast in one eye.

"You lookin' for trouble, Lorimer?" he asked angrily.

"Yeah," said Slim softly. "You got any with yuh, Bridgeford? I'll take yore whole —— crop."

The crowd moved away from behind Bridgeford, who was in a tight place—and knew it.

"Li'l Bo-Peep she's lost her goat," said Dirty softly.

Bridgeford glanced sidewise at Dirty and relaxed. He had thought to bluff Slim; now he was bluffed himself.

"Down in Texas," said a soft-voiced cowpuncher, "they used to sorta try 'em, gents. Mebbe it don't do no good, but yuh allus feel that they've had a chance thataway. Kinda like the old miners' court."

That suggestion seemed to find instant favor. It savored of justice and would be interesting.

"You bring the prisoner," ordered Bridgeford. "We'll go over to the Trail and hold court."

"Yo're —— right I won't do no such a thing," declared Limpy belligerently. "This here prisoner belongs to me."

There was a moment of indecision. The mob wanted to take Pattee over to the Trail saloon, but none of them wanted to make the first move. Some one on the sidewalk happened to look up the street, where Dynamite Denayer, Molly Holton and Clare Denayer were coming in on horseback.

"Here comes the man to judge the case," he yelled. "We'll let Dynamite Denayer be the judge."

There was a general laugh, but the idea seemed to strike their fancy. It attracted every one to such an extent that four or five men dashed in, overpowered Limpy and Baldy, and secured Cale Pattee before any one could interfere.

With their prisoner in the center, the mob started for the Trail, while Slim, Arizony, Dirty and the sheriff swore vengeance and trotted along. Baldy still sat on the sidewalk where he had been unceremoniously dumped, and spewed profanity.

The crowd surrounded Dynamite and the two girls, while some of their number hustled Pattee inside the saloon. There was a babel of many voices, as they explained to Dynamite what they wanted him to do.

He sat very straight in his saddle, looking out over their heads. It was more of a mockery than an honor. Not a man in that crowd but knew that Dynamite's own son was wanted on the same charge. He would be forced to pass a rough justice on the accomplice of his son.

Slim could see that Molly and Clare were badly frightened at the attitude of the crowd and were looking around for a possible exit. There was no chance for him to help them; no possible chance even to get near enough to speak.

"He's afraid to be the judge," yelled a voice. "He's plumb yaller."

Dynamite's eyes searched the crowd for the speaker, but was unable to locate him. Then he started to swing out of his saddle, while the crowd applauded his decision. They surged in around him and all moved into the saloon.

Slim reached the two girls and hurriedly told them to go across the street.

"There's goin' to be trouble," he told them.

"Have you seen Rowdy?" asked Clare anxiously.

Slim shook his head quickly.

"Not yet, Clare. I hope to —— that he don't come. Nothin' can save him, if he shows up now. You girls keep out of range of the windows and doors, 'cause there's goin' to be a lot of trouble."

"And dad will have to be the judge," said Clare breathlessly.

Slim nodded and looked back across the street. Agnes Pattee was sitting on the sidewalk, a forlorn little figure, all alone. Slim looked up at Clare, shook his head sadly, adjusted his gun and strode swiftly toward the saloon.

The Trail saloon was filled with conversation and smoke. The honkatonk platform had been appropriated by the chief actors in this cow-town attempt at swift justice. Cale Pattee had been seated in a chair near the center, tied securely, and Dynamite Denayer was just getting on to the platform when Slim managed to force his way near the front.

He could see Arizony near the corner of the bar, standing on the bar-rail, while Dirty was further on in the crowd. Buck Zaney climbed up behind Dynamite, followed by Bridgeford and several other cattlemen.

"Is Buck goin' to defend the prisoner?" yelled a cowboy.

Buck joined in the general laugh, until some one yelled:

"He needs somebody to defend him. If we had Rowdy here we'd have a full-house."

Buck glared down at the speaker, but did not reply. The men on the platform were arguing with Dynamite and the crowd became impatient.

"Cut 'er loose!" whooped an impatient voice. "Yo're almost as slow as the law."

Dynamite turned from the men around him and came to the edge of the platform.

"Gentlemen," he said hoarsely, "you have forced me into something that I don't want to do."

"Same with Pattee," whooped a range wit.

"It is not a square deal to the prisoner," continued Dynamite. "What chance has he to present his evidence? Give him to the law and let him have his chance. You are all civilized men—not savages. Use a little common sense."

This did not meet the approval of the crowd and Dynamite knew that there was no use in appealing to their better judgment.

"Give him a fair trial here," urged a voice. "That's what we hired yuh for, Dynamite."

"Suppose I find him not guilty," said Dynamite.

"See if yuh can, old-timer," laughed the speaker.

Buck Zaney stepped to the front and held up a hand for silence.

"We're goin' to handle this thing right," he announced. "If Cale Pattee has any defense, he'll get a chance to tell it to us. We say he robbed the stage and killed Kelly. He says he didn't. We'll find out who's right. Somebody must be wrong."

"That's the stuff, Buck," applauded several voices. "Let him prove that he didn't do it."

"Where's the evidence against him?" demanded Slim.

"Yeah, where is it?" asked several voices.

"Where's Limpy Overton?" asked Buck. "He's got it."

"You find it, if yuh can!" yelled Limpy from back near the door. "And I dare yuh to hang Cale Pattee without any evidence ag'in' him. It'll send yuh all to the penitentiary."

Came the sound of a scuffle near the door and several men rushed up through the room, half-carrying the cursing sheriff, who was fighting with tooth and nail. They rushed him up to the platform and searched his pockets, but did not find the knife.

"Go ahead," said Limpy ominously. "You'll all pay for this. I'll have yuh all in jail, if I have to ask the State for troops. I can do it, too."

"Oh, ——! This is a farce!" yelled Bridgeford. "What do we need of the evidence? If Limpy didn't have plenty of evidence he wouldn't have captured him. Let's go ahead."

"Yeah, and we don't need a judge!" yelled another. "Let's get it over with."

Slim turned his head slightly and almost looked into Rowdy's face. He was staring at the platform, his face just a trifle white, his eyes half-closed. Slim tried to reach out and touch him, but the distance was too great and Rowdy was working his way to the front.

Suddenly he found an opening, where he walked quickly through and mounted the platform before any one, except Slim, had noticed him. Dynamite turned and looked at him. Rowdy was looking at the crowd, which had gone silent at sight of him.

Quick as a flash Buck Zaney and Bridgeford had grasped Rowdy by the arms and held him helpless; but Rowdy made no effort to shake loose. A roar of surprize swept over the crowd. This was better than they had expected. Slim slid his gun loose and wondered just where to start in.

"Lookin' for me, wasn't yuh?" asked Rowdy coldly.

"You said it, pretty boy!" yelled a voice in the crowd.

Rowdy tried to reach his gun, but Bridgeford jerked his arm away and took the gun himself. A sag in Rowdy's shirt front attracted Bridgeford, who reached in, possibly thinking that it might be another gun, and took out the package of water-soaked bills. He looked at them closely and held them out in his hand.

"Look what he was packin'! More money!"

Rowdy said nothing, while they examined the bills. The package was handed to Limpy, who looked them over and compared the numbers with a penciled list he carried.

"They're some of the stolen bills, ain't they?" asked Buck.

Limpy nodded slowly and looked up at Rowdy.

"They don't belong to me," said Rowdy simply, and the crowd laughed.

"Didja just borrow 'em?" queried Bridgeford.

"No."

Rowdy shook his head slowly.

"I found 'em."

"Found 'em?" Buck laughed, and the crowd laughed with him.

"Yeah, I found some more in my pantsleg the other day," said Rowdy. "Found eighteen hundred dollars worth. I owed Smilin' Smith eight hundred and Buck Zaney a thousand. It's kinda funny to find just what yuh owe, ain't it?"

The crowd did not respond to this. They could hardly understand a man offering an excuse of that kind.

"If yuh didn't steal that money, why did yuh try to pay yore debts with it?" queried Buck sarcastically.

"Just to find out who lost it" grinned Rowdy. "I had an idea, Buck. Whoever shoved it into my pants-leg knowed, or felt sure, that I'd flash some of it. They wanted the deadwood on me, and I took a chance on 'em showin' their hand."

Some of the crowd laughed their disbelief of this, but Rowdy noted that several of the audience seemed impressed by his reasoning.

"Yuh see," continued Rowdy, "Cale Pattee didn't lose that knife. I'm the one that lost it."

This was a facer for the crowd and they looked at each other, as if seeking the reason why Rowdy should incriminate himself.

"Then you admit doin' the job, eh?" queried Buck.

Rowdy shook his head.

"No-o-o; but I admit havin' the knife. I don't know how I lost it, though."

This seemed so lame that the crowd laughed.

"I don't reckon we need any trial" opined one of them, and his opinion seemed favorable to every one, except those vitally interested.

"Who put the money in yore pants-leg?" asked Limpy.

"I wish I knew, Limpy," smiled Rowdy. "He sure was generous. And the queer part of it all was — he knowed just how much money I owed."

This sounded interesting.

"Suppose you tell all yore story," suggested Limpy. "It's kinda all mixed up the way yuh been talkin'."

"Well, I'll tell yuh all I know," said Rowdy. "I don't know——"

"What don't yuh know?" asked Buck.

"The last chapter ain't been written yet, Buck."

"Oh, I see. Well, go ahead."

Rowdy looked down at the crowd and squinted thoughtfully.

"I can't hardly begin the day of the hold-up, because I don't know where I was nor what I done that day. I reckon I was gosh-awful drunk. It was the evenin' of that day, when I found myself lyin' in the brush about half-a-mile out of town, with a busted quart bottle beside me.

"My horse was out there, too, with the tie-rope tangled in a mesquite bush. I went home. I reckon some of the boys at the ranch can swear to what time I got there. It was just a little later that Cale Pattee got away from Limpy at the ranch-house."

"Yeah, and you helped Pattee get away from me," accused Limpy.

"Does anybody except yourself know that you was out there in the brush?" queried Buck.

Rowdy shook his head.

"Then that's yore only alibi?" Thus Bridgeford, grinning.

"It shore is a good one," laughed one of the crowd.

"Did you know that Pattee was innocent, when you helped him get away from me?" asked Limpy.

"No."

"What's all the stallin' about?" asked the cowboy that Arizony had upset in the street. "Get a little action."

"That part is comin', feller," called Arizony. "You get hold of yore gun with both hands, 'cause I'm choosin' you when things get to goin'."

Rowdy laughed and tried to get a glimpse of Arizony; but Bridgeford yanked him back. The crowd realized that the boys from the T-Anchor-Bar were a menace to them although it was only three against many times that number.

"Put it up to the judge," urged one of them. "He's a square shooter."

"You can't expect him to hang his own son, can yuh?" queried another sarcastically. "Let Buck or Bridgeford do the judgin' in this case."

"What in —— do we need a judge for?" demanded Arizony's especial enemy. "Put a rope on him and he'll tell the truth."

"I don't want to shoot any innocent folks," said Arizony, "so I ask yuh to kindly move away from that —— whippoorwill and gimme a open shot at him."

"Save yore powder," advised Slim. "When the music starts that jackrabbit will be runnin' away too fast to hurt anybody."

Bridgeford held up his hand for silence.

"Gents, we are kinda hog-tied right now. It ain't right to ask Denayer to judge this case; so we ask yuh to choose another judge."

"Elect Buck," suggested the sheriff.

"That's a fine idea," applauded Dirty. "Rowdy has whipped him a couple of times, and he'd jist naturally love Rowdy."

Buck glared at Dirty, but said nothing.

"Well, go ahead and elect somebody," said the sheriff. "I can't help myself, 'cause I ain't got no gun; but I'm sure goin' to send a whole flock of you jaspers to the penitentiary, if yuh don't lemme have my prisoners."

"Thasso?" Buck laughed. "Where will you get a jury in this county to convict us."

The crowd laughed, as they realized the truth of Buck's query. Dynamite Denayer had walked to the edge of the platform and was about to step down, when there was a slight commotion in the crowd.

A man was forcing his way through; a big man, his head swathed in bandages, humped over and coming through by main strength. Men were swearing at him, trying to hold him back, but he shoved them aside and reached the platform.

It was Skee Belton. He was not lovely to look upon, with his big head bandaged tightly, a trickle of blood down the bridge of his nose, his eyes wide and flushed with fever.

He planted his feet wide apart, as if bracing himself to withstand a blow, and looked at those on the platform.

The room was silent and all eyes were upon him. Most of the men knew who he was; knew what had happened to him, and wondered that the man was able to leave his bed.

Belton's eyes seemed to be playing tricks with him. He brushed a hand across them and grunted angrily. His six-shooter was shoved into the waist-band of his overalls. Rowdy was staring down at him and a smile crossed Belton's lips.

"Hello, par'ner," he said huskily.

"Hello, Skee; how are yuh feelin'?" said Rowdy.

Belton blinked and looked at Cale Pattee, who was still roped to the chair. Buck had released Rowdy's arm slightly and was watching Belton closely.

"Is that yor best friend, par'ner?" queried Belton, nodding toward Pattee.

Rowdy nodded.

Belton squinted up at Buck intently for several moments. It seemed to Rowdy as if Belton was trying to remember Buck. Then Belton's lips drew away from his teeth in an animal-like smile, as he said:

"Where's Inker?"

Buck did not reply, but Rowdy knew that the question had been directed at Buck.

"He don't know that Inker is dead," said some one.

Belton heard the remark, but did not turn his head.

"Inker's dead, eh?" he said slowly. "What killed Inker?"

Buck was squinting out over the heads of the crowd, paying no attention to Belton's question.

"Buck shot him in a fight," offered the sheriff.

"Buck did?" Belton spoke vacantly, as if the death of Inker did not concern him greatly; but shifted his feet slightly and looked at Rowdy.

"Inker's dead, eh? What's all the meetin' about, par'ner?"

"They're tryin' to get up enough nerve to hang me for robbin' the stage and killin' the driver," said Rowdy.

"Oh, yeah."

Belton put a hand up to his head and his eyes contracted sharply. It was evident that his head was paining him greatly.

"Well, what's all the interruption about?" queried Bridgeford. "Let's go ahead."

"What did Buck kill Inker for?" asked Belton.

"Yuh might ask Buck," suggested the sheriff.

"Buck would lie." Belton's voice seemed flat. "Buck is a liar."

Buck's body stiffened. He wore no gun in sight, but every one knew that Buck never went unarmed. Still he made no move to resent Belton's statement. The crowd had forgotten Rowdy and had given Belton and Buck all their attention.

"Inker's dead." Belton repeated it as though to himself. "Inker came after me—" He hesitated as if trying to straighten things out in his own mind. "Yeah, he came after me. Buck killed him after that. He——"

Then Belton laughed. It was the chuckling laugh of an idiot who has suddenly discovered something. The men who were close to him moved aside, as if afraid of him.

"I remember," said Belton, still chuckling, "Rowdy saved my life—and I didn't owe him anythin'. I—" He shook his head slowly— "I never had a friend before. He said that Pattee was his best friend and they were goin' to hang him. Ha, ha, ha!" Again the insane chuckle and the bared teeth.

Buck's hand crept back toward his hip.

"Look out for him!"

It was the doctor's voice. He had forced his way to a spot near Slim.

"The man is crazy."

"The man is crazy," repeated Belton vacantly, "and they're tryin' to hang his best friend."

He suddenly leaned forward, placed his big hands on the edge of the platform and vaulted up beside Rowdy. Buck and Bridgeford moved back quickly, leaving Rowdy loose.

Limpy Overton had drawn his gun. He was afraid of what Skee Belton might do in his condition, and was preparing to stop him. Rowdy quickly stepped between Belton and the sheriff.

"Put up yore gun, Limpy!" he snapped. "This man ain't crazy."

But Belton was paying no attention to any of the crowd now; he was grinning at Buck.

"Yuh killed Inker, didn't yuh, Buck?" he was saying softly, but loud enough for the silent audience to hear every word. "Me and you both know why, don't we, Buck? Ha, ha, ha! Inker knew too much. It was all a —— bad mistake, Buck. You didn't know that Pattee was goin' to be the man, didja? Mebbe yuh didn't know that Rowdy was goin' to save my life, and that Pattee was Rowdy's best friend."

"I don't know what yuh mean," breathed Buck.

His body was tensed forward, his eyes nearly shut, but his mouth was wide open, his breathing audible.

"Yuh don't?" Belton's voice was husky with pain. "When yuh doped Rowdy's whisky, stole that knife and left him out in the brush to sleep it off, yuh didn't know it was Pattee's knife, Buck. Yuh thought it belonged to Rowdy, and yuh wanted to hang him 'cause he whipped yuh with a gun-barrel.

"I never had a friend, Buck—never. I allus said I wish I had one. I've got one now. They can't hang him, 'cause you killed Kelly, and you tried to kill me. I—I'm comin', Buck!"

Buck had fairly shriveled under the accusation, and as Belton shrieked his warning he whipped out a heavy Colt revolver and fired it just as Skee Belton crashed into him.

They went crashing backward and the gun whirled out of Buck's hand. Bridgeford sprang off the platform and the crowd surged back, not knowing what might happen next. Then Belton surged to his feet, with Buck in his arms. In his insane fury he carried Buck easily, although Buck had gone limp.

Rowdy had not moved. Belton paused beside him, a half-smile on his lips, as if nothing out of the ordinary was happening, and said:

"Par'ner, mebbe we're even now. Me and Buck was both guilty—not you and Pattee. He tried to kill me, 'cause he knowed I was yore friend. I—I've allus wanted a friend, old par'ner. Buck was afraid they'd get Pattee instead of you; so he doped yore whisky and planted them bills on yuh. He let Inker in on the deal and then killed him, after he thought he had killed me."

Belton's voice failed him and his knees sagged, but he shook his head, as if to clear away the mists that were creeping over his mind, and said slowly:

"If yuh can remember me as a friend—I'm glad, Rowdy. I've gotta go now. The old river is pretty high, *compadre.* She looks kinda swift, don't she? Well——"

He turned away, his eyes going suddenly blank, and before any one could stop him, he stepped off the high platform, with Buck Zaney in his arms, and they crashed to the floor in a heap.

For a moment there was silence following the crash, and then the voice of Limpy Overton broke the silence—

"Good ——, what a finish!"

Rowdy vaulted down beside them and willing hands pulled them apart. The doctor clawed his way to the platform and the crowd backed away to give him room. Skee Belton was uppermost and was the first to be examined.

"He's dead," said the doctor, looking up at the faces around him. "How he lived that long is a mystery. He was shot almost through the heart."

He drew Buck's body around and the head lolled loosely. Either Skee Belton had broken Buck's neck or it had been broken in the fall from the platform.

Dynamite Denayer was cutting the ropes off Cale Pattee and shaking hands with him. Men vaulted to the platform to shake hands with the man they had come to lynch. Rowdy shook off congratulations and forced his way toward the door, with Slim right behind him.

Molly and Clare were half-way across the street, coming toward the Trail saloon, frightened at the revolver shot and the sudden roar of voices. Agnes Pattee was still on the opposite sidewalk, humped over, with her chin on her hands.

Clare choked back a scream of delight and ran to Rowdy, with Molly close behind her. She did not ask for explanations. Rowdy was free, and the men were laughing in the saloon door.

Rowdy threw an arm around her, but did not speak. Molly offered her hand and he gripped it tightly for a moment.

Then he walked straight to Agnes Pattee and she got to her feet. He threw an arm around her shoulder and drew her to him. Molly, Clare and Slim watched them closely. They were talking, but their tones were low.

Rowdy put a hand to his face, shook his head slowly and laughed. Something seemed to amuse him greatly. Then he nodded and led her toward the group in the street. Dynamite was coming from the saloon and his step was springy, a smile on his lips.

Pattee came out behind him and reached the group just as Rowdy and Agnes came up. Dynamite held out his hand and Rowdy took it quickly. Neither of them spoke, but there was a world of meaning in their attitude.

"We'll go home now," said Slim. "It'll be good to go home now, folks."

"I can't go home yet," said Rowdy.

Arizony and Dirty were coming up to them, and Arizony was grinning through a pair of split lips.

"H'rah, for our side!" he chuckled. "I told that hungry-lookin' puncher that I'd choose him first. When he wakes up he'll prob'ly brag about loosenin' my teeth, but I don't mind about the teeth. I ain't goin' to bite nobody, because I'm too dog-gone happy."

"Can't yuh go home now, Rowdy?" queried Slim.

Rowdy shook his head.

"Not yet, Slim. I've got a little surgical operation I've gotta have done right away."

"Surgical operation?" queried Dynamite.

"Yeah."

Rowdy grinned and put his hand on Agnes' shoulder.

"Yuh might take my wife home for me. Yuh see—" grinning at their amazement—"me and Agnes were married a month ago in San Jacinto County, but we kept still about it."

Molly was the first to congratulate them, and she said to Agnes:

"I do not wonder that you—well, I think I know how you felt when you found me with him in that cabin."

"And with his nose busted," added Agnes smiling.

She turned to Dynamite and held out her hand.

"You hurt me that day," she said simply, "when you told me that we were a no-good outfit; so I told you about Rowdy. I knew you wouldn't tell, and even if you did, a wife can't testify against her husband."

Dynamite took her hand and held it between both of his.

"I'm sorry for a lot of things," he told her, "but I'm glad for a lot more things. One of them is for you."

"My ——, let's go home," blurted Arizony, "Dynamite Denayer is gettin' poetical."

"But about this surgical operation," said Clare anxiously.

Rowdy grinned and shook his head.

"I liked the Pattee family," he said slowly, "because they never made fun of my face. I—I kinda fell in love with Agnes because she accepted me in spite of my looks. I got this busted nose joyfully, proudly. It made me look like I thought a man ought to look—to be a man.

"Now," Rowdy laughed softly, "my wife says I'm a —— of a lookin' husband; so I've got to get the doctor to bust up my perfectly good he-man nose and put her back where she belongs."

"Well, yuh can't please everybody," said Dirty seriously.

A crowd of men were coming out of the saloon, carrying the body of Skee Belton, wrapped in a blanket. They were bareheaded, walking slowly. The men outside the door removed their hats and stepped aside. It was like the passing of a great man instead of a confessed outlaw.

"And I got him out of the flood—a best friend," said Rowdy, almost in a whisper, his voice husky.

"Gosh!" breathed Arizony. "They wanted to lynch the man that robbed the stage; and now they're walking slow like beside him, hats in their hands."

"Well, he took his medicine gracefully," said Dirty. "A man can't be so danged bad when he does things thataway. I wish I'd 'a' knowed him better."

Limpy Overton came up to them, his face showing a mixture of relief and sadness.

"Limpy," said Rowdy, "me and you are goin' to be friends from now on, and I'd like to have yuh give me that knife for a souvenir."

"Yeah?"

Limpy squinted away and dug his heel in the ground.

"I—I ain't got it, Rowdy."

"Yuh ain't?"

"Where is it?" asked Cale Pattee.

Limpy hitched up his belt and squinted thoughtfully.

"Well, yuh see," he looked at Cale Pattee, "I had it in my pocket the night I arrested yuh the first time, Cale. I didn't know who might try to swipe it; so I kept it with me.

"That night, I remember yuh sayin' to yore wife, Cale—

" 'Honey, it was worth it jist to eat a meal with you.' "

Limpy stopped and a wistful smile crossed his lips, as he stared down at the ground. When he looked up there was a suspicion of moisture about his eyes.

"Yuh see!" he hesitated for a moment—"yuh see, I was a married man once myself, and I—I knowed what yuh meant, Cale; so, somewhere between here and the Bar-66, I throwed that knife away."

He turned quickly and headed for the office, while they stared at each other.

"My ——!" exploded Arizony. "We wasted twelve sticks of perfectly good dynamite, Dirty."

"And we thought he was ag'in' all of us," said Slim.

"That's nothin'," grinned Rowdy, "I thought the whole world was against me; but it was because I was against the world."

"You're all right now, son," said Dynamite thankfully.

"All except his nose," added Agnes.

BEFORE THE BLIGHT OF GOLD

by Hugh Pendexter

CONSIDERABLE has been written about the decimation of the aborigines in California after James Wilson Marshall, carpenter and farmer and a native of New Jersey, formed a partnership with Captain John A. Sutter in building a sawmill forty miles from Sutter's Fort, and accidentally picked up a piece of gold. Marshall's find in the tailrace of the new mill meant the thirty-first State in the Union. And it destroyed the old peaceful life of the Indians west of the Sierra Nevada. It also destroyed the old peaceful life of Captain Sutter, who since 1839 had been overlord of the vast Sacramento Valley.

That parallelogram of sun-baked brick walls, five hundred by one hundred and fifty feet, occupying a small hill on a tiny tributary to the Rio de los Americanos near the junction of the latter with the Sacramento, was the distributing point for more than twenty thousand aborigines living the red life, and half a hundred who had been converted by the priests. Of whites there were 289 (December, 1847), some negroes, breeds and Hawaiians. Captain Sutter at the end of 1847 was between forty-five and fifty years old, a native of Switzerland, cultured, generous and captivating in manner. His life before coming to California was one continuous dramatic, romantic adventure. Before gold exterminated them the aborigines of his new home were many and at first ruthless. With a handful of men he was repeatedly besieged, and for days at a time subsisted only on a nutritious grass.

By degrees he won the red men's friendship, and the converted, or "tame" Indians were glad to work for him. During planting and harvesting he hired several hundred of them. The captain issued a tin coin, on which was stamped the number of days a laborer had worked, and these coins were received for merchandise at his general store.

Even in an unfavorable year his wheat crop would be at least eight thousand bushels. His launches, of fifty tons burden, carried produce, hides and tallow to the Bay. He introduced hemp, and his first crop rivaled any ever grown in Kentucky. His vegetables were of great variety and of the highest quality. Impost duties kept out the elegancies of life, but Sutter's community was self-supporting. His cattle numbered thousands. His flour mill turned out unbolted flour at eight dollars per hundredweight.

If the furniture of his home were rough, of food and comfort there was a plenty.

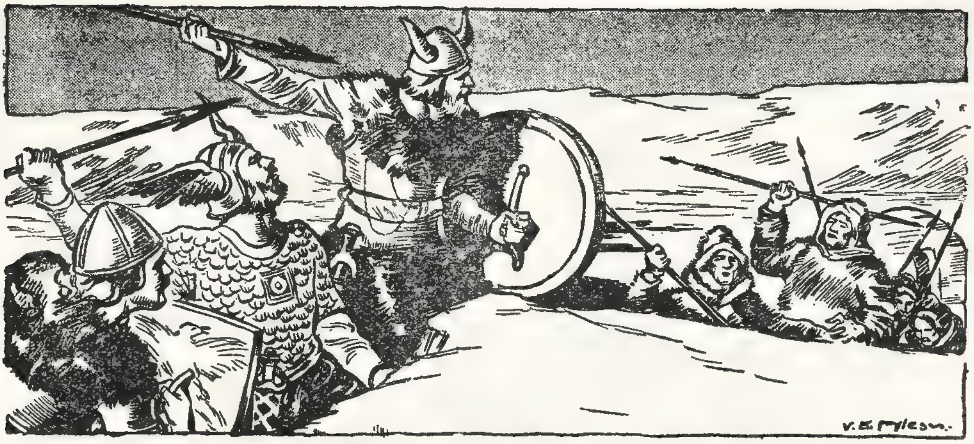
In addition to his fort he laid out Sutterville, three miles below on the Sacramento. Six miles up the American, so-called by Sutter, the Mormons built his flour mill. He held a grant of eleven leagues. He gave the name to the Feather River from the feather ornaments worn by the natives, and on it were his chief stock-range and several fine ranches.

He was magnate and potentate and all but emperor of upper California. His shops and store-rooms were crowded with eager Indians, exchanging their tin coins for goods. Well-disciplined Indians and a dozen white men sufficed for a garrison.

He dominated the life of the valley, his trading ventures extending north to Klamath River and beyond. Never had the red men west of the Sierras enjoyed such opportunities. Well-fed and contented they looked on him as the source of undreamed-of comforts. Haphazard diet of acorns and small game was succeeded by abundance of beef.

Life under the Sutter régime was idyllic for the aborigine. Then the piece of gold was picked up, and inside three months California knew the great secret, and at the end of twelve the world knew it; and the old order vanished never to return.

Other white men had employed Indians as did Sutter. Their holdings vanished. The Bureau of American Ethnology (Bulletin 30) estimates that a population of 250,000 aborigines dwindled to less than 20,000 chiefly because of wholesale massacres perpetrated by miners and early settlers, and by the introduction of disease and vices.



THE BLOOD TRAIL

by William Byron Mowery

Author of "As Gentlemen Should," "Winged Judgment," etc.

ALL day had Karluk and I, in the teeth of a polar storm, driven across the snowy barrens and ice sierras of the heart of Fox Land, where a fair day's drive is from longitude to longitude. Though unable to see twenty paces in the swirling arctic northeaster and though ten feet of changing drift covered the path, my young Innuit guide unerringly followed the ages-old *komatik* trail that wound eastward through passes, among labyrinthine cliffs of ice, and passed towering mountains which showed along their sides half a thousand layers of ice-hard snow, each layer the product of one Winter's snowfall and Summer's thaw.

We were building a tiny igloo on the spot where Karluk had fired pointblank at a dim wraith in the storm and brought down a white caribou. Rather the Innuit was building the night's shelter; I was only in his way.

This Karluk the guide was a find. I had plucked him from the Iglulermiut only a week before. He was a young giant with a keen appetite for hard travel and far wandering. Which was strange to find in a young fellow just married to such a sunny, round-faced, cooing girl as Lilka. His infallible high spirits were a tonic. At the slightest pretext for merriment he would throw back his head and roar softly, with a toss of the foxtail on his *capote*.

More important to me, Karluk was a treasure-trove of Eskimo tradition, legend and superstition. Either he knew more tales of the snowlands than the oldest *shaman* I had ever met; or else he was not so reticent about telling them. He was something of a skeptic. He laughed like a healthy animal at the *shaman* magic and folk-lore of his people. He would finish a story, look at me from twinkling eyes, ask the equivalent of, "Now isn't that a whopper?" then toss his head and roar softly.

Karluk seemed different from the other Innuits, even from his own Iglulermiut. I had lived with Eskimos from Kotzebue Sound to the Cape of God's Mercie without finding a specimen to match him. I could not understand his strangeness. I was not blind, nor a poor excuse of an ethnologist. The fact is that under the flash and play of the Borealis near the crown of the world, a man's eyes do queer tricks. In the semi-dark I have stalked a hoary marmot or Arctic ground-hog, believing it was a polar bear. I have seen hunters fling away their spears and flee in terror from a snow-shoe rabbit. In a weird land, strange things go unseen. It was really no blame of mine that I did not notice certain things.

"Karluk," I said, as we cooked callops of caribou over the primo-stove in the igloo, "now that we have made a kill near the place where we will search for the stone houses, we can stay here for seven sleeps and find if the rumors of the coast tribes be true."

"Seven or seventy and seven, it is all the same," retorted Karluk. "You will find no stone houses, *kabluna*. That is an old wives' tale."

"Are you in a hurry to give up the trail and get back to Lilka?" I demanded.

Karluk tossed his head and laughed softly.

"I am not! I will be your guide to Nudujen, Tunniren, Tudjan, and even to Akpansoak. But we will find no stone houses."

I jumped in astonishment. Karluk had named the traditional path of the viking band in its westward wandering. It seemed he knew as much as I about the great trek. I sensed a tradition which might piece together the bits of half-fable-half-history I had gathered precariously.

"You don't believe the legends of the Blood Trail then, Karluk?" I queried.

"There is no difference if they be true or false, those legends," said the young Innuit. "If they be not true, you will not find the stone houses you seek. If they be true, neither."

"Here," said I, handing him *stemmo* for his pipe. "Explain why I will find no stone houses even if the legends of the Blood Trail be true."

II

"THE story," replied Karluk, "was told me by old Natagliak who bleeds at the mouth when he talks; to him it was told by Eumenek, his father—to him by Tojak—to him by Kriliaqatiak—to him by——"

"Stop!" I interposed. "My ears buzz with names of the long dead. How many have been the generations?"

"Four times that."

Karluk held up a hand.

"And the first teller, in the ages gone, was Knuluk, chief hunter of the Iglulermiut, who could take two bears by the scruff of their necks and bang their heads together."

"That," I interrupted, "*is* a whopper. But what has that to do with the story of the Blood Trail?"

"Nothing," Karluk replied. "Nothing, *kabluna*, except that both stories came from the same mouth!"

He roared softly, with a toss of his head, at having scored decisively.

"One day," he began abruptly and soberly, "as many generations ago as I have fingers and toes, plus one for the toe that is frozen off, in the Moon of Flying Frost a man stumbled into the village of the Iglulermiut, who in those days numbered fifty *igloos* and a hundred hunters. One arm of the man was cloven off short at his shoulder; he bled from a dozen great wounds and dropped dead before all his story was told. He was the last of the Yakakapmiut, a powerful tribe up the coast.

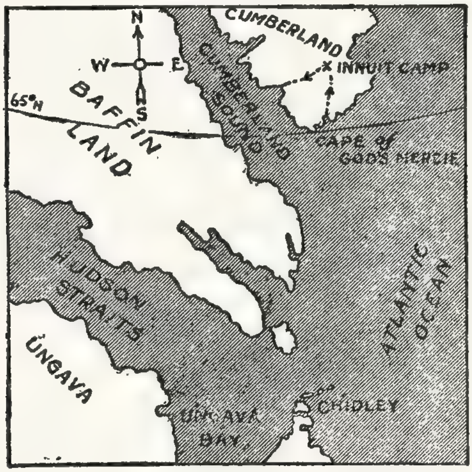
"He told a strange tale of sixty singing, fair-faced giants, with their wives and *illillegahs*, who had cut their way through blood and treachery down the coast to the Yakakapmiut. The men wore shirts of iron and head-dress of iron and swung axes of iron behind round shields of ox-hide. Two hundred hunters of the Yakakapmiut went out to meet them, though the strangers asked for peace. They battled on the hummocky ice-plain. Every fair-faced giant that fell was ringed with hunters who would hunt no more. Only the man whose arm was cloven from his shoulder by the stroke of an ax escaped the slaughter and fled to warn the Iglulermiut.

"Knuluk gathered his men. The women and *illillegahs* were taken on *komatiks* to a place of safety in a hidden ice-gorge. Harpoons were piled handily; spearheads were renewed; and knives whetted against green walrus ivory. Hunters and weapons were in readiness when the fair-faced giants, singing and stroking iron on iron, appeared in the valley and came down to meet the Iglulermiut. At their singing the hunters trembled, but they were brave men and ran forward with Knuluk to greet the enemy.

"After the great fight with the Yakakapmiut there were but twenty-five of the giants and many of them bore wounds of spear or harpoon; but they came on, neither faster nor slower, against the Iglulermiut. At their head strode a giant, taller than any of them, tossing his ax in the air and catching it. When they were still two good spear tosses away, this leader of the singing strangers grasped an iron-shod spear, drew back his arm, and hurled the weapon as never before had an Innuit seen a spear hurled. It whistled over Knuluk who had stooped, and ran through the breast of a hunter. Whereupon the leader raised his hand and the singing and stroking of iron on iron stopped.

" '*Aksunai,*' he shouted, so that the hills around flung back his voice. '*Aksunai*, Innuits, we come peacefully. Be wise and let us pass.'

"The Iglulermiut laughed scornfully and Knuluk mocked the leader with the slaughter of the Yakakapmiut and of the blood trail they had cut through the other tribes.



" 'It is no fault of ours if our trail be red with blood,' answered the leader. 'We have not sought battle, but at every step we have been beset. We would pass your village peacefully and avoid blood-shed.'

" 'Then turn back,' cried Knuluk. 'You can go back peacefully because there are no Innuits left on the trail by which you came.'

" 'There will be no turning back,' said the leader in a loud voice. 'We have come from afar and the trail is weary. We are going south even farther than we have come—to the sunland where we hope to find others of our people who long ago forsook us. Move your warriors aside and let us pass.'

"Knuluk, being wise, would have agreed but the Iglulermiut cried, 'Treachery!' and a knot of young hunters ran forward and flung their weapons. The tall leader caught a spear in mid-air and tossed it through an Innuit. The fair-haired women of the giants fell back. The singing and stroking of iron on iron began afresh, and the warriors surged forward.

"Their shields of ox-hide made a solid wall, *kabluna*, against which the Innuit harpoons and spears rattled harmlessly. A shower of iron-tipped arrows cut down half a score of the Iglulermiut. They knew nothing of fighting in a body. Hence, when the shield-wall of the tall warriors struck them, they could not hold ground though they were as four to one. With their iron axes and with never an abatement in their singing, the strangers cut a broad path through the huddled Innuits.

"Knuluk and a dozen picked men flung themselves forward to break the shield-wall, but they were tossed back like spindrift from a cliff. The numbers that were slain were five of the wounded strangers and thirty of the Iglulermiut.

"A knot of ten Innuits ran up the hill-slope and tossed down harpoons into the midst of the enemy. Five of the fair-faces marched up the hill and slew the ten Innuits. Before they could return through the deep snow, they were hemmed in by Knuluk's men. Still singing, as they plied spear and battle-ax, they fell forward, one by one, on their faces. The number of the slain were twelve of the giants and fifty of the hunters.

"Knuluk then sent men to make a show of attacking the fair-faced women, but these fought fiercely as she-bears and drew bow with deadly aim. When the warriors saw their women attacked they fell back orderly, still singing and stroking iron on iron, till they formed a wall about their wives and *illillegahs*.

"Craftily Knuluk drew off his men. They were sick of the senseless slaughter they had brought upon themselves and were ready to give the day to the enemy.

" 'See!' cried Knuluk. 'The strangers have no more of the iron-tipped spears. They are flinging back at us only the weapons that we throw at them. Let them shoot the bow. When they have no more arrows we will close with them and avenge our brethren speedily.'

"But the strangers were quick to guess the cunning and they ceased shooting. Their bows, *kabluna*, were as tall as they, and so strong that not an Innuit could draw an arrow to the head. The strings were of the flaxen hair of the fair-faced women; and when a bowstring broke, a woman sprang up ready with a new string braided from her own hair. They were fighting fiends, *kabluna*, and their singing which rose and fell with the tide of battle chilled the hearts of the Iglulermiut.

"When Knuluk saw that they had guessed his cunning, he sent hunters to the circle of the *igloos* to gather all the hides and skins in the lodges. Of these he began to fashion great shields behind which a dozen men could hide in safety. The fair-faced warriors let loose a shower of arrows while the shields were in the making, but Knuluk merely drew his men back out of range.

"Four of the huge shields were made and placed properly on the four sides of the enemy. Knuluk gave a shout and the ramparts moved forward. Still the giants sang and stroked iron on iron—even those that knelt bleeding in the snow; and the tall leader tossed his ax in air and caught it.

"Behind their shelters of hides the Iglulermiut moved steadily forward, certain that now they could break the shield wall and come at the warriors body to body. The fair-faces arched arrows high into the air and wounded several Innuits; but so many of the hunters had died that the others had no care of being slain. With death all around them, those that lived had fear of it no longer. The arrows ceased; no spears were tossed from either side; even the singing quavered as the great shields moved forward foot by foot and struck the circle of warriors. Massed behind their shelters, the Iglulermiut struck irresistibly. The circle was broken. The Innuits leaped into the midst.

"It was battle-ax against spear; one warrior against four hunters. In the thick fight knives were out; the fair-faces slashed and hewed with short, heavy swords. But they were flung apart; they no longer stood leg to leg and shield to shield. The Iglulermiut had learned to strike where the iron shirt met the iron head-dress of the strangers. There the neck could be pierced. So thick was the fight that those slain could not fall. They were battling fiends, those tall warriors. They would sink to a knee under a thrust, but rise and cleave an Innuit's head from his shoulder even while they struggled in the death-throe. But as wolves can bring down the male of the caribou, so the remnant of Iglulermiut, fighting silently, brought down the warriors, one after one, till only the tall leader was still on his feet battling.

"Knuluk and five others were thrusting at him and his iron shirt ran red with blood. But he swung his heavy ax in a circle by the chain which held it to his wrist; and brained two hunters who had flung themselves at him. While he swung his ax, he drew his hand across his eyes to wipe away the blood so that he might see clearly. Even Knuluk trembled at the ferocity of his face.

"In the breathing space that they gave him, he turned and saw that all his warriors were lying on the snow. With a great voice he called an order to the women. They seized weapons and began to turn them against themselves, but the Iglulermiut at a word from Knuluk ran in and tore the weapons from their hands.

"The tall leader did not see this. Bearing the song of the warriors by himself, he sprang at the knot of hunters about Knuluk. A spear-thrust broke the fastening of the iron head-dress and the leader fought uncovered. He dashed his ax against the face of an Innuit and with a back stroke clove through the shoulder of Knuluk, so that the great hunter thereafter was helpless as a babe. A spear from the hand of Knuluk's son hurtled through the air and struck the tall leader in the throat. His song, and the slaughter, and the Blood Trail of the fair-faced wandering giants were ended.

"There is little else to tell, *kabluna*, though by the order of Knuluk the fair-haired women were saved.

" 'They are the wives of the great warriors,' said he. 'We will take them to our *igloos* and be husband to them so that the blood of the fighting warriors will henceforth run in the veins of the Iglulermiut.' "

III

KARLUK ceased. I was looking into the flame of the seal-oil lamp, caught up in the wildness of his narrative and visioning the great-hearted battles of Gunnar, or Lief the Lucky, or Njal who was burned under the ox-hide. At a slight sound I looked up sharply.

The young Innuit was tossing his head perilously close to the lamp-flame and was roaring softly. I searched the face of this Karluk who lay against the wall of the *igloo* and laughed so heartily at the legend he had just recounted.

Suddenly, even as he laughed, my vague, unfashioned notion of his strangeness among the Innuits became clear and startling.

I could but stare at him—at his blue eyes; his features not Mongoloid but sharply Nordic; his bearded face; and his wavy hair light-brown almost to flaxen.

"Isn't that a whopper?" he demanded, with a soft roar and a toss of the fox-tail. "True or false, you see why you will find no stone houses. If true, the warriors died on the march; if false, they never lived. The warriors were too busy cutting the Blood Trail to build houses. Ho! Two hundred and fifty men slain in a day! Singing giants dressed in iron! And the women braiding bowstrings of their hair, and later bearing children to the hunters of the Iglulermiut! The tale of Knuluk cracking bear heads together is as nothing, *kabluna*, to that whopper!"

Giants on LIFE

by Bill Adams

On Dogs and Children

OUT upon that particular grove where I am at work there are two boys; ages four and five, or very close thereabouts. You have lived long enough to know that it's an easy matter to fool *any* man, if you go about it right; but the more you try to fool a child, the worse off you become for the simple reason that a child can see right into your soul through the little eyes of truth and innocence. I remember my own childhood remarkably clearly; and, remembering it, recall the actual faces of various grown-up folks who endeavored to correct my ways—without first correcting their own.

As a child perhaps I was unusually crooked—as a regular young Gipsy amongst the then-a-day children?

But, crooked or not, I know you couldn't tell me a lie and make me believe it. All children are liars, you know, in a way, telling you that there are goblins up the chimney, and gnomes in the cellar, and heaven only knows what upon the roof. The difference between child lies and grown-up lies is that child lies try to make old folks young again, by seeing life through child eyes, while grown-up folks' lies ruin a whole world for *everybody*—quite removing the possibility of there ever being a sign of a fairy at all in any corner.

I'm wandering am I not? Well, why shouldn't I wander? I'll do just as I please when I write you or any one else a letter.

Stories are tame and trellised things; but letters, as wild poppies, ought to bloom freely, wherever the seeds fly upon the wind of thought. Oughtn't they?

Well, now, to return to the two small children with whom I conversed while at my daily work. I must add that there was also a collie dog. I am fond of dogs. We get along well. A man with whom a dog can not get along well, is no man for me, for dogs are like children—they scent a hungry hypocrite a far way off.

I sat upon my heels, all crouched up in a lump, so as to have my eyes on a level with the eyes of the rest of the little jury. Then I called the dog and the two children. Says I—

"What do you know about grown-ups?"

The dog looked knowing, wagging his tail. The children looked at me, smiling. I hated to push the question for the reason that, never having *quite* grown up, I was able to guess the answer; and did not want to have to tell you to your face what we think of you.

One of the children though, pushed it for me, turning bold upon me to say—

"What do you?"

I said, after the foolish, cowardly fashion of a grown-up, afraid to be honest—

"I don't know."

The dog barked at that juncture. Wagging his tail harder than before.

"He knows," said one of the children.

"He does," said the other.

"What does he know?" said I.

"Grown-ups ought to be all there," said the child, pointing to a hole the dog was rapidly digging.

"Ah—" said I, "then, we'd have the whole world to ourselves, eh?"

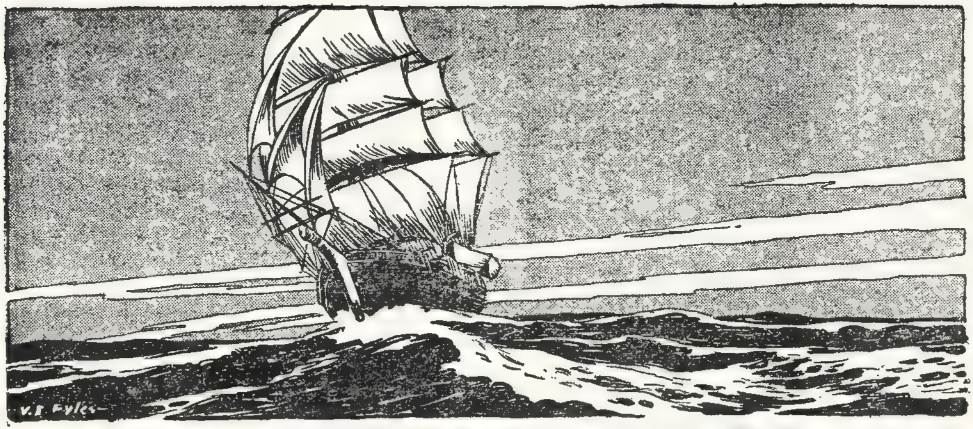
"That's what it's for," said the two in chorus, "all of us."

There now! You know the worst.

The jury says that you and your grown-up comrades all are but fit for a hole in the ground.

Why? Just because you've let yourselves grow up.

"On Dogs and Children," copyright, 1924, by Bill Adams.



PEARL-HUNGER

A Five-Part Story ~ Part I

by GORDON YOUNG

Author of "Everhard and the Russian Count," "Ointment Pots," etc.

YOUNG RAEBURN had come off the schooner to bring back word as to how Captain Bennings was making out. His daughter wanted to know. She had been on shore most of the day, and being sent back to the ship by her father, so that she could have dry clothes and something warm to eat, had, with night coming on, made a messenger of him.

As both the other men in the hut were silent—Captain Bennings with his pain, Will Heddon with black thoughts—Raeburn, wet and unhappy, squatted down in a corner and kept still.

* * *

THE sky was hung with wet sponges. Wind with a host of unseen feet trampled across the forest. Surf boomed and crumbled on the reefs. Outside, a greasy, slate-colored sea was running, with swells bellying into combers mast high as they touched shoal water, and broke with a jar that seemed to shake things up down around the old island's foothold.

The hut was dark, barn-like, with no furnishings to speak of; it was sago-thatched, looked like a hay-stack and the eaves came almost to the ground. There was one doorway and that like a window; but there were no windows. The hot air was moist, as in a boiler-room, full of flies, sticky, persistent, droning like the ghosts of fiddle players. The floor was earth, hard, bare like nakedness, littered and had not been swept for days. The dust of sweeping got into the throat of the sick man on the pallet of mats and blankets.

He was dying. He had been dying for a month; knew it, cursed himself, God too, and would not pray to live. He wanted to live, would have given anything to live; but he did not believe in prayer. "Jimcrackery," he called it.

Few were the prayers that Raeburn had ever said, and not much in the way of wickedness he had dodged, but it gave him a shudder or two when Bennings was writhing about, saying things.

With Bennings it wasn't so much the pain, though he was full of that too, as it was the naked anger of a baffled man from whose mouth the cup had been knocked time and again just as he was ready to drink.

A native's arrow had gone into his lung, and though he had cleaned out the breast wound with a flash of gunpowder—there wasn't much in the way of medicine that they had on board—disease, with some witchman's poison in it, ate him up.

His schooner was out in the bay, jerking at her anchor chain, trying to get free and pile herself on the beach, as many a good ship—and good man too—had done down in those waters.

"Pearl-Hunger," copyright, 1924, by Gordon Young.

He had thought it was the heave of the swells in even that well-sheltered bay that made him dizzy so he saw a haze of beams overhead, and made it so that nothing would stand still before his eyes; then, as he begged his men to do it, they had brought him on a stretcher of oars and canvas into the hut.

He said little as words go in the round of a clock, for in some ways he was a secretive man, but what he said was enough to have damned a score, he being as full of bitterness as pain.

He had been cheated, bowled over, knocked out, just as he was ready to put the old *Gloria* about and make for the harbor of a Christian port. So he had brought up in the shelter of the Urigo Lagoon, and by giving the village chief some colored pipes, tobacco, two or three butcher-knives and a bolt of calico, he in turn had given Bennings a hut in which to die.

Raeburn suspected, too, that the mop-headed old cannibal sat by his coconut-shell fire, smoking his pipes and puzzling his monkey brain over whether or not to take a whack at the *Gloria* on chance of gutting her and getting white men's heads for his rafters.

Raeburn sat there in the corner so long and quietly, having plenty to think about, that, with night coming on, the other men forgot him; and he would almost forget himself till Bennings snarled out something blasphemous; and when mildest would say—

"Life is a —— of a thing!"

For him it had been.

A dozen years before, with even then a hard-fought life behind him, he had been a trader up in the Carolines. His wife—her name was Gloria—was young and pretty, but with her head screwed on the wrong way or she would never have married him. Bennings had won her romantically from two or three rich men in San Francisco and brought her into the tropics.

They had cruised about a full year or more, with him laying out trading stations here and there; and she having a great time of it, being made much over by every village, and town too that was big enough to have a club where white men were trying to drink themselves to death while the tropics ate into their bones. Then, *kerplunk*, down he dropped her in the Carolines, with a house fine enough to have suited a magistrate's wife. He loved her greatly, and was kind too, giving her all the luxuries that could be put into tin cans and bottles, or got out of mail-order catalogs.

She gave him two girl babies—one blond as a sunbeam and the other more dark—who, under the care of a native woman, dabbled about in the sand.

Bennings had a few thousand dollars in a Honolulu bank for a rainy day, a fast schooner, held the mortgage and insurance on two or three more, owned a share in a Queensland sugar mill, and had an interest in trading stations all about. Business was on the rise and by a far glance he could see in the offing, against the day he retired, as good a house as a rich man would want in some big city, with servants, horses, the best society, and a fine name such as wealth gives almost any man to make people bow and scrape as he passes along the street.

Then the busy meddlers that pull the wires to make mortals hop and topple moved their fingers, and Bennings started to go to the dogs fast as a man can jig, taking the youngest of the girl babies—her name was Gloria, too—with him.

His wife had taken the other child, the one that was golden as a sunbeam—her name was Margaret—when she went off with the rich young San Franciscan who had got it in his head that he couldn't be happy with any other woman, and so in his yacht had dropped down into the Carolines.

"It's the way of the world with a woman," Heddon said to Raeburn during one of the fifty times that they talked it over. "It started in Eden, and there's all about some more of it in any newspaper, today's, yesterday's or tomorrow's."

Bennings sent his curse after them; then, as men do to spite a woman, joined the legionaries of the damned, turning pearl-trader and pirate. He kept the child with him, and, until she died, a black, fat native woman—the one who had stolen the child she loved best out of the house and taken to the bush when she overheard the mother and yachtsman getting ready to make their jump.

As the child shed her babyhood and began to be full of kisses and hugs, busy with prattle and play, Bennings sort of yanked himself together and, like a gambler that thinks bad luck can't last, began once more to peer ahead to the time when he would leave the sea. From year to year he put it off, keeping the girl with him though most of his work was outside the law and all of it was dangerous, at least with dangerous men ever on the lookout to get the better of him. It was known, or thought anyhow, that he carried more of a treasure than that girl about with him on the *Gloria*.

She was more to him than his eyes, and not knowing what all was in the world did not greatly miss the things she wanted. But a time or two she had been in Sydney, in Honolulu, and there was a queer pile of books in the cabin for anybody's daughter to be reading. She read them, and there was no one who knew what went on behind her steady gray eyes; but it was plain that her thoughts were turning more and more to what lay beyond her watery horizon. At last Bennings decided it was high time to let go his anchor in some white man's bay.

Now, over and over from his pallet, with memories oozing up into his thoughts, he snarled—

"Life is a —— of a thing!"

Raeburn sat still, with nothing to say and in no hurry to get back to the schooner where he knew the girl was waiting for him, sitting about with empty hands and a wondering stare.

She was all choked up with anxiousness and a kind of bewilderment, as if somebody had put two hands to her heart and was just about to squeeze tight. She didn't know much about death, except that there was such a thing, and it usually got men who fell over the side when sharks were about.

II

NIGHT was coming on, and with it the jungle chill that crept in under sweating flesh and made the bones cold.

Flies buzzed and lit like falling specks on Bennings' face. He sucked with gasps at the hot air, and the air was full of the stench of the water-soaked jungle.

"Heddon!"

Heddon was leaning against the doorway, pipe in hand, blowing the smoke out, for it got into Bennings' throat and made him cough. Without turning he answered—

"Now what?"

He had been answering to his name at all hours of the night and day, keeping watch over Bennings and sleeping, when he did sleep, on a damp pallet, being called from it any time to split a coconut and pour a cupful of sweet juice through the hot, bearded lips, parched as if scorched by their blasphemy; and when he was called, night or day, he did not know whether it was a drink that Bennings wanted or a pair of ears for a new curse that was sizzling between his teeth.

Bennings was a gaunt hulk of a man, now dismantled and rotting away; or worse than that, and more to the point, he lay bearded and shriveled like a skeleton that had found a hairy mask and a dried hide to crawl into. He was on his back with Death—a wolfish thing, Death!—worrying and gnawing the life out of him.

"Come here! Come here! —— you, come here!"

Heddon, with slow unconcern, being pretty well frazzled by the time he was having of it, and hating the jungle anyhow with something extra for the wash-tubs that were being dumped out of the sky, knocked the tobacco from his pipe, stuck it stem first into his waistband, straightened up, pulled at his belt and crossed to the pallet.

Heddon, too, was a big, powerful man, straight up and down, six feet and something over, and carried himself on the balls of his feet with head up. He was young, too, as men go, with a hard, knotted face, high cheeks, thick nose, full mouth and a chin like a fist. His fists were black, cut, calloused, scarred on the knuckles, but the fingers were long, tapering, like the fingers of a musician. Queer-looking fellow, and one that anybody would look at more than once and wonder about. His hair was black and thick; it covered his ears, hung half-way down the back of his neck, was unevenly trimmed, for Raeburn was not much of a barber, and anybody might have taken it for a wig. He often went for weeks without shaving. His eyes were dark, appeared darker than they were, for they sat deep in their sockets under heavy brows, and were tired, sullenly weary; and when he was angry had a sort of phosphorescent glitter, like a cat's in the dark.

His voice was smooth, inflectional, hardly pleasant, loud at times, lots of times, for he often cursed chuckle-headed natives and swindling traders; but he never seemed really angry at these times: it was more as if he were trying to make other people angry. Always, whether drunk or sober, something cool and watchful seemed to be standing up at the back of his eyes.

Though drink he would, he never got

enough hot liquor on board to put him under the table, and he could capsize any two men that ever came at him when he was in an ugly mood and jeered them into coming. That is, any two men if the notorious "Black" McGree was not one of them.

Black McGree was a giant, half-Irish, half-Spanish; twice Heddon had fought with him, once on the beach from breakfast until noon when even the very spectators grew tired, and he and McGree almost became friends through bantering and jeering each other when, dripping blood and sweat, they clenched from time to time for breath. McGree had been shot and knifed, but he had never before had a man stand up to him.

Heddon was moody, often sullen, sometimes in a sort of bitter good humor, occasionally almost cheerful; and at times he would fling poetry out of his head just about as he had once flung a handful of pearls—Raeburn's share among them—into the face of a swindling consul who had offered to make erasures in a bad report if the bag of pearls fell into his hand. They had fallen into his face; but the consul took them as they came, and with a kind of perverted honesty reported that the native sailor had cracked his neck by a fall from the crosstrees instead of being knocked to the deck by a fist of long, tapering fingers—like a musician's.

Heddon and Bennings were something alike though they had been dumped into the world from different cradles: one had been pounded over the head with books and knew more than was good for any wastrel; but sea currents had carried each to the outermost fringe of the earth; both were scornful of ethics and of laws; both full of the illusion that they were disillusioned; and both had been cut adrift by women.

Bennings had picked up Heddon and Raeburn over on the Kulico Reefs. It was Heddon that he had wanted for some special work a little to windward of the law; but for some months Heddon had been knocking about with Raeburn under his arm, and would not stir off the beach without him. Said he liked the color of the boy's hair, that if he lost sight of him he might never find another fellow with just that shade of red a-top his skull.

That had been two or three years back, and from then on the two of them had spent more time on than off the *Gloria*.

THE bearded skeleton now gazed up from his pallet—

"Why in —— wasn't it you, 'stead of me that got it!'

Heddon smiled a little, without humor and without triumph; he was dead tired and in no mood to care much just then what got him, but he had to grin a little at the bad joke of whatever gods may be in killing off old Bennings just as he was ready to quit the South Seas, take his sack of dollars and daughter and creep back into the warm woolly herd, all bunched together in cities like a flock of sheep in a squatter's paddock.

"Perhaps," Heddon had reflected, "it wasn't by way of a joke, but vengeance, that the gods had struck—as those in high places do any deserter."

Heddon was full of queer fancies; there was a sort of glitter and grotesqueness in them. He had read too much poetry and couldn't be rid of the stuff. It had gone into the cracks and crevices of his brain. No getting it out.

Bennings' eyes glared up at him—

"It ought have been you that got this—you've nothing to live for!"

"Right," said Heddon, uninterested.

"But what are you going to do with her? What are you going to do after you throw me in a hole? Don't bury me in sand—I don't want them —— little crabs nippin' at my hide. What are you going to do with her? And the ship? Speak up! Tell me the truth. It won't make a difference now. I'm a dead man. Be honest once. I want to know."

"I don't know. What'd you want done?"

"I'll not waste breath pullin' a promise out o' you. You're a bigger scoundrel than I am, Will Heddon. There 's education—you've got it. An' what do you do with it? Like a bag o' poison in a snake's head. You can lie to dagoes and squareheads in their own tongue, an' white men believe you're a gentleman. What you goin' to do with my girl?"

"What 'd you want done?"

"I don't want you marryin' her!"

"Who the —— would want to marry a daughter of yours?" said Heddon.

"Better than you would do it."

"Let them."

"Don't you let them! Hear me? Don't you let 'em!"

"Precious little I'll ever have to do with what any woman does."

"You'll rob her of everything—you an' that —— "Red" Raeburn. Like niggers after turtles' eggs, you'll do it! Funny how like eggs pearls are."

"Devil's eggs," said Heddon.

"—— you, Heddon, I've always liked you. Now I don't trust you. A woman an' money—I wouldn't trust any man. You less than most."

"You're a wise man, Bennings."

"Shut up! I've made a woman out o' her."

"So they've noticed over on the Kulicos. Black McGree especially."

Bennings groaned and cursed, tumbling out red words that blasted everything he could think of, cursing the Reefs, cursing McGree. There was reason for thinking that Black McGree's hand had been somewhere behind the arrow that had poisoned his breast.

The Kulicos were hot sand-spits and coral, topped by scraggly palms, with pandanus scrub that stood out in the moonlight like an army of scarecrows.

Sharp traders, thieves, worse than thieves, men that were on the dodge, and women of a sort that any man's the worse for knowing, gathered there; blackbirders—wanting crews; pearlers; small ships in need of reckless fellows for out-of-the-way business came in, and departed mysteriously; it was a sort of sanctuary for the riffraff and riflers, a kind of thieves' market, an island doggery and babel—bad place for ships or men, for many of both were wrecked in one way and another among that splatter of rocks and scrub that showed like fly-specks on the map.

The Kulicos were not under any flag; they had never seemed worth the cotton it would take from a ship's locker to claim them—that is, till the time had passed when one country might have put them under its tongue, like crums from beside a dinner plate, without making other countries snarl, for pearls were there and thereabouts. Hard men fished them and robbed one another.

"Will, don't go there again—not with her on the ship! Promise me that——"

"I promise nothing," said Heddon.

"Aye, you've always kept your word," said Bennings more quietly.

"Tell me what you want done with her. I'll do a little something that way if you tell me what. But no out-and-out promise—no."

"I've made a real woman out of her. I wanted a woman's softness and beauty near me. It's in a man's blood I guess. A woman I could trust an' hold soft and close, that wasn't after something every minute—or some other man. She's different, Will Heddon. You know she's different."

"They all are," said Heddon, without interest.

"You can't fool me, —— you! I've seen you lookin' at her since I been here, flattened out like a nigger to a gratin' gettin' rope's end on his hide. An' —— you, I know what you think: 'It's all mine, now. Shark-nosed death 'll drag the old man under in a day or two. Then it's mine—ship, girl an' all.' That's what you're sayin' inside of your heart."

"When you're dead you'll know better."

"An' be no more helpless than now!"

"But better off—perhaps," said Heddon, moodily. "But what of her?"

"She's changed sudden-like. Was just a child, but now there's the woman in her peerin' out. What sort of woman, I wonder? I've wondered a lot about that. She's queer, that girl. Not like her mother. Quieter. Darker. Little Margaret was like her mother. I've wondered about her, too, lyin' here. What's come of her, and what's she like? And now in Gloria the woman's peerin' out. That's why I was leavin' the sea. You've seen it too. I've watched you lookin' at her!"

Heddon shook a match from a small, wide-mouthed bottle—the moisture ruined matches that were not kept airtight. He lighted the lantern that dangled by a string from a rafter, then, cracking a coconut, poured the milk into a tin cup.

"Here," he said, offering it to Bennings.

"Put a little gin in it, Will. It's cold down deep inside of me—a little gin. Lord, I don't want to be buried out in the rain!"

Heddon walked across the hut and was stooping for the half-empty square-face before he noticed Raeburn. He stopped with a look as if not quite sure that it was not the devil waiting there to pack old Bennings off; then he grinned a little, but did not say anything, and his grin was that tired and twisted as if he did not care whether he, too, was shouldered by the devil.

He took up the half-empty square-face, shook the bottle, holding it against the lantern, and poured a half-cup full of white fire into the milk. He kept the bottle in his hand, being too experienced to leave it near Raeburn now that he had had a whiff, and, going back across the hut, squatted on his heels beside the pallet, slipped his hand under Benning's head, raised him a little and held the cup to the hot, bloodless lips.

Bennings sucked noisily, his weak fingers fumbling against Heddon's hand that held the cup; then he lay back, rolled his head from side to side, cursed a while, groaned a bit, then said savagely:

"Think you're foolin' me by playin' nurse, don't you? Think I'll weaken an' tell you where I've got my pearls hid, don't you?"

"I've never asked you, have I?"

"No, you knew better. Part o' your —— cunning. I'll never tell. To —— with you—I'll die first!"

He glared searchingly, but Heddon showed no particular interest one way or another. He poured some gin into the cup and sipped it—sipped raw gin as if he was tasting tea instead of hot coals.

"Listen, Will. You do something for her if I tell you? You'll never find them. Nobody knows. Will you?"

"Oh ——, I've known for a year. Behind the mirror you let into the cabin bulkhead, at the end of the book-case. But what is it you want done?"

"Eh? What's that? You were just waitin' for a chanct to steal 'em, eh? So that's it! How'd you find that out? If I was on my feet I'd choke you, —— you!"

"I wish to —— you were on your feet. It's going to be lonely. —— it, you have been a friend. What'd you want done with the girl?"

"Aye, what? What? What else have I been thinkin' of these days and nights? Half wishin' her mother had taken her too. She'd have grown up in a city, like a girl should. I'd like to know what's become o' little Margie."

"Count on it, she knows how to play with men," said Heddon, taking a deeper sip of gin.

"It's women, always women—you hate 'em or love 'em, and can't get away from one or the other. You've been drunk enough to talk, Heddon; and any beachcomber knows my story—though they've all forgotten the name of the man that did me wrong."

"I haven't. You've told it to me enough times."

"Will Heddon, if that girl of mine ever plays with a man—any man—I'll crawl out of —— an' choke her!"

"She will," said Heddon. "They all do."

"Think so, honest? What makes you think so, Will?"

"Because the only ones that don't are cut out of marble—then locked up in museums. Your girl has been slow finding it out, but she's waking up. What'd you want me to do with her?"

"Will? Will, why not marry her?"

"No."

"She's rich. You know what's there behind the mirror. Pearls, a quart of pearls! The pick of everything. You know."

"No. I never looked."

"You never *looked!* You're a liar! Any man would—and I know it! How'd you know if you didn't look?"

"I've seen you at them."

"And you never looked?"

"How the ——'s a man going to steal anything if he has to look straight in a mirror to do it?"

Bennings made a harsh sound like laughter, and one of his weak hands groped out toward Heddon:

"You've got good stuff down in you. I've been thinkin' of all that. I know you won't rob an old man's little girl. I wish Margie could have some of them. She was more like her mother,—white and gold. With skin like a pearl."

"A heart like one, too," said Heddon.

"There's more than enough to be happy on, so why not marry her, Will?"

"No! I told you *no!*"

"Please, for me, Will!"

"What's got into you? No, I told you!"

"I wanted to try you out. I wouldn't have liked it if you'd been eager. There's none with better faces than hers, and I've watched her sharp. You know how I've watched her. You're a —— scoundrel, but you're not rotten. Marry her, Will, and if she ever looks at another man, kill her! Hear me, you kill her!"

"Why didn't you kill her mother?"

"I swore to, but I couldn't, Will. So soft and pretty. 'T would have been like tramping on a pearl. I ought 'ave done. I couldn't!"

"That's the way of it. You can't hurt 'em. If you do, you're worse than a dog. If you don't, you're a —— fool."

"But you do it for me, Will. Marry her!"

"Oh, go to ——," said Heddon sullenly.

"Then what's to become of her!"

"How do I know? Tell me what you want done."

Bennings groaned, cursed impotently, then:

"She's too old for a convent, and I've kept all that raffle out of her head. Does 'em no good. I ought to have given her away when she was a baby, but I wanted something by me I could love. Something that 'd be mine, an' no other man's. I've given her every thing I could. —— you, Will Heddon, I love that girl. It's a dying man that asks you, an' I been a friend to you—marry her, won't you?"

"No!"

"Why not?"

Heddon gave no answer. None was needed. He poured more gin into his cup and sipped at it.

IT HAD come on dark as a bottomless cave outside, with rain and wind trampling the jungle, and the surf's hoarse boom jarring the reefs. More clouds had ridden up overhead, piling themselves on top of what were there, so from time to time thunder broke behind a sheet of fire that leaped into every corner and crack. A few moths that had lodged through the day in dry places under the thatch came out and began their frantic fluttering about the dim lantern, splattering themselves against the hot sooty chimney. As Heddon watched them, he nodded slowly.

"Fools, like men," he said.

Bennings, quietly, like a gambler that has lost his all and is through even with cursing his luck, said:

"You'll look after her a bit? You'll do that? She don't know men for all I've warned her, and there's nobody to care, except for what they can get away from her. You couldn't send her to your people, Will?"

"What do you know of my people? Why them?"

"I've no one in the world to leave her to. And you've been drunk enough to talk, Will."

"If I sent her they'd pitch her out in the street. If I have talked, you know that."

"I've thought of it all, clear around the compass," said Bennings wearily. "Take her to Lianfo and—and——"

"Now you're thinking of my cousin there," said Heddon, eying him.

"Yes, in a way, I am, Will," Bennings answered with a sad sort of frankness.

"Well stop it. He's a young idiot and can pick his own women. Yet at that, I ought to pay him back somehow in bad coin. If it hadn't been for him, when things blew up with me I wouldn't have landed in this part of the world. From the time he could walk he talked South Seas. No, I'll not take her there. I don't want to see him."

"Take her to Lianfo, Will. To old George Sanborn. He's consul there. They're old people, him and his wife, with two girls dead. Tell 'em she's mine—my child. They knew me in the old days. There's nobody else I can think of would care, except for her money. What's wrong with your cousin, Will?"

"Nothing. That's the trouble with him. He doesn't drink, doesn't gamble, doesn't swear, never kissed a woman, he's twenty-four years old and is wasting a fond father's money trying to be a planter. Everybody knows he's an ass, a regular Sir Galahad. Though at that he's a pretty decent boy. He was the only one that didn't turn tail and run after my smash-up. I haven't seen him for years. I have never been in Lianfo. I don't know what he's like now, only he could never be anything but a —— fool. He tries too hard to do what's right."

"Take her to Lianfo, Will. To—to old George Sanborn. You'll do that?"

"All right. Yes. I'll do that much. But it's to Sanborn I'm taking her—not to Fred Oxenham. It wouldn't be right to turn any woman loose on him. He's helpless. He ought to be in a convent. He's a —— idiot. He thinks women have something sacred in them. We grew up in the same block together——"

"In Washington?"

"Yes. And he always had the crazy idea that it was hard for any man to be worthy of the woman he married. Was always what he called 'saving himself for the *one* woman.' Had the crazy notion that if a man always did 'right' that he was bound to get along fine. Believed all the poetry he read about women, and only read the Tennysonian sort. A —— fool. I could never stand him, but I have to feel grateful toward him for not hiding his thin peaked face after I had jarred everybody else that knew me into hysterics. That's one reason I've steered clear of Lianfo though he's sent word a hundred times—once by Black McGree! I'll beat that —— to death yet!"

Heddon glanced toward the discolored bandage on the sick man's gaunt chest.

"Take her to Lianfo, Will," Bennings pleaded in a voice weak, anxious, strained, reaching out with fumbling weakness. "Take her, promise. You'll take her, Will?"

ALL were quiet, with nothing to say; and nobody moved for what seemed to Raeburn like half the night, and may have been a half-hour, before Bennings began to groan and twist and would not answer though both bent to him.

He struggled and gasped and coughed, writhing about, the sounds growing somehow farther off as if he talked, or tried to, from a distance, like one that for all he can do is being carried away and cries out for help.

So he died, all twisted, with knees drawn up and hands clenched, mouth open, teeth showing, like a man struck cold in the midst of a fight.

They peered down at him.

Rain fell. Outside, the water dripped, streamed, gurgled. The deep vague booming of the surf went on. Far away, native voices shouted over some late game in a crowded hut. Thunder blows beat on the drum of a sky. It was as if Bennings, mere fly-speck of a mortal, had chanced to die while heaven sounded a funeral dirge for a dead god.

Heddon drew the small bottle from his pocket, shook out a match, struck it, held the flame down close to the wide staring eyes. There was no flicker in them; the pupils were set, lifeless—as if painted.

"Dead. Aye, and you know it all, now! It may be they'll let you finger a few of the lives and put them through a merry jig. A fine Punch and Judy show, this earth, Bennings; and you'll be laughing too, like the others behind the scenes!"

Heddon and Raeburn drew together, squatting in silence at a far side of the hut. They pulled out pipes, crumbled moist nigger-head into the bowls and puffed. Smoke would not make a dead man cough, not unless there was sulphur in it.

The lantern gave but a dim glow. Heddon frowned moodily toward it, watching. The moths went on, splattering themselves against the chimney, dropping away dizzily, coming up with zigzag darting, eager as men to get themselves to the pretty flame; and no matter how often battered and burned, back they came, drawn they knew not why, unappeasably maddened, frantic to have it, feel it, beat it with scorched wings, and, like men, die of their pain, fluttering down—as souls fall hellward—to the earth floor where Bennings lay.

They opened a bottle of gin, talking with half-finished sentences as they passed the tin cup back and forth; talking of Black McGree, of Lianfo, the girl; of Bennings and his luck. They had little to say that had not been said between them a score of times, but they kept words in the air to ease the chill loneliness of the hut.

Raeburn said that he ought to be going back to the ship to tell that Bennings had died.

Heddon was in a black mood anyhow, and flared: Why did fools always hurry into a scene to break bad news as though it could not wait? They come bustling in, all aglow, however long their face, feeling important, almost cheerful.

"No, you wait for dawn," he said.

They smoked and talked the same thing over again and again, without being a word further along at the last than at the first; and they drank the bottle dry and started another to keep out the chill, but the chill came and whittled on their bones.

Now and then they gave a glance toward the pallet and were silent. The sheer finality of death was depressing; its mystery shadowed with immemorial awe: the shoulder-to-shoulder companion had lurched out and was gone—like the flame out of an ember.

Bennings had been a good man in the only way that Heddon had come to care about men.

A woman had scuppered him.

"She wouldn't care if she knew," said Heddon. "They're all alike. They belong in harems—with eunuchs at the door, sword in hand!"

BENNINGS had been one of few men who fished oysters for their pearls and not for shell. Now and then he would load up with "gold lip," but for the most part he drove no bargain with shell. And it was seldom they on the *Gloria* pried open a ton of shell without getting something for their pains; and pains they were too. No steaming and boiling on the *Gloria*, and many a time there was no chance to rot the shell on the beach; so it was the knife's edge that did the work, that and raw finger-tips, amid the stench of a charnel house. Bennings wanted pearls, not shell, and there seemed to be something about his wanting that got them for him as no other man could. Other men had followed him, tried to wreck him and rob him; and many a swindling trader nursed a grudge. Bennings had got hold at one time of some very fine French pearls, imitations, beauties, that greedy landlubbers who sold rotten supplies could hardly tell from the real gems.

Whether Bennings believed it, or used it to keep her by him, the facts bore out his saying that he had no luck unless Gloria was on the ship when the divers went overboard. And so, though she knew nothing much of their value, from the time she could toddle Gloria had fingered pearls not a queen on earth but would have shortened the legs of her throne to own.

III

DAWN came through rain.

Heddon knocked out his pipe on which he had been sucking as he walked slowly up and down, barefooted on the bare floor. He peered upward out of the square hole that made the doorway. There was a little clearing before the hut where the village roasted pigs, long pigs too, and danced in the light of the moon; and now he could see a bit of the sky. It had the color of blue mud.

He slipped his bare feet into heavy shoes, put on a floppy hat, jammed himself into a yellow rubber coat that had long before split across the back, like a locust cracking its shell, because of his breadth of shoulder; then, ramming niggerhead into his pipe, lighted it, turned the pipe upsided own, said, "Come on," and climbed through the window-like doorway.

They went tramping and slipping through the black mud toward the beach.

Shaggy huts stood about in disorderly rows. No one but themselves was astir. It was like desolation in the black, wet jungle.

Heddon hated it, all of it: the natives with their faces, like hairless monkeys, their naked skins leperously encrusted and spotted with sores, the women pot-bellied, the men squatty, anthropoidal, shaggy-headed, guttural and grinning; their throaty chatter, thievish beggary, tribal howling and yeowling and *thump, thump, thump* of hollowed log drums no longer touched even his curiosity, and it irritated him like any dissonant nuisance. He did not believe they were as human as dogs. He had no scientific concern or romantic interest in aborigines, and no fear of them.

All of which was a part of his hatred of the jungle, and many the curses he had poured out on the jungles. Always they were dark, massive, cavernous; trees were massed and swaying in a botanical Saturnalia, with a maze of vampirish vines, embracingly destructive, twining their slender lengths through the whole of it, like the legs and arms of women through the world; all of it rank with the odors of growth, full of stench, rotten and fertile.

They ran a small outrigger canoe down the sand into the water, took up the short spade-like paddles and dug at the water, heading for the *Gloria*.

THE *Gloria* was a small three-masted schooner, high in the bows, narrow of beam — too narrow, she rolled like a barrel going down-hill—flush-decked, low bulwarks, and hove to she rode any sea all the same as a corked bottle.

She had been built in Scotland for a gentleman who liked the sea, or thought he did; but, so the story went, her rolling made him so drunk that he gave her up for a very poor song. Somebody brought her south for the copra trade, but with her low bulwarks and barrel-like roll in every heavy sea she shook so many of the crew overboard that she was not successful. Somebody ran her over to the Kulicos and put her under a hammer—anything that anybody did not want was auctioned off over on the Kulicos — and Bennings bought her for what her binnacle would have cost at a chandler's. Not having his eyes on the cargo space—a few tons of shell was the most he troubled himself with—he chucked permanent ballast into her and cut her up pretty much into living-quarters. He wanted the girl and himself to have a home, and the others of the crew to be out of the way.

Everything that money and a father's fondness could get together was crowded into the cabin, but Raeburn wondered how the girl got through her prison-like loneliness. Though she appeared tame enough, there was a steady searching look in her darkly gray eyes that made him feel that she wanted to pick some of them to pieces and see what a man was made of.

Bennings always carried a sizable crew, for there was nothing to be gained in his line by making two men do the work of three; and more than once, or twice too for that matter, the *Gloria* had stood to her anchor and fought it out on the pearling grounds. The forecastle could have held twenty men without laying them heels to head, like sardines in a can, or as they used to do the cargo on the old slavers; and she usually carried a baker's dozen, the unlucky man being a Chinese cook, or steward, who waited hand and foot on the cabin—which is to say Gloria.

There were three white men that had quarters forward of the cabin, and in rough weather they used the cabin companion. All of them, excepting perhaps Raeburn, wished the girl ten leagues farther than out of sight, and even he did not care much about her. She kept greatly to herself, which was as the distrustful Bennings wanted. Occasionally she spoke with Raeburn, and though quiet enough and never speaking of anything that could not have been shouted, Raeburn felt that she had a mask on, and a pretty one too, for in her eyes was a strange, steady, searching look that seemed to say—

"There's a big world outside, full of people, and though it will do no good to ask you, I mean to find out; and as far as that goes, I know some things now you can't guess."

But it was Heddon who said:

"Like all men, Bennings is a fool over women. Take this one. He thinks because he frowns and keeps her silent around us men that he is sheltering her. But a pigeon-egg of a pearl, whether of flesh or oyster, can't be hid away, no matter how hard you try, or where you put it. Anyhow there's something womanish about a pearl that makes it show itself and its twinkle of maddening luster, as if it wanted to make men fight over it—and they do; so that, with much spilling of blood and gold it passes from hand to hand, moving up and through the world until it settles on the neck of some woman who is its match. And as every thief, fisher or jeweler knows, when a pearl finds its match, the value of each is doubled.

"And moreover," said Heddon, spinning the words carelessly, "every pearl that has life in it is *alive!* A pearl can be as dead as Egypt's queen, and worth no more than its same weight in her old bones; but pearls that are alive, live.

"The thieves, like us, the fishers, jewelers, and anybody else that has lived with pearls and handled them, knows this. That's why pearlers are a mad lot. Scientific men, with dust in their veins, crack pearls in their mortars, boil 'em in tubes, slide 'em under a microscope and tell the world that pearls are nothing much but carbonate of lime, a trace of water, and a tincture of organic matter; but for all that a woman, as far as these scientific men know, is nothing much but lime and water, touched too with organic matter; but if a woman, a real pearl woman, got one of them by the ears, or if he was locked up over night with some of the pearls I've seen, that scientific man would never care again to poke his nose in a test-tube.

"And there are fellows who sneer that a pearl is nothing but a pretty mausoleum for a worm that's stung the oyster; and what's a woman but the same for the worm that was in Eden's apple?

"But this child of Bennings' is no pearl woman, and will never be. It isn't in her. She's not even pretty. She's dull. No flame. No fire. All she'll ever want out of life is love—not to see men writhe as she holds them over the flame. Bennings' wife was the other kind. I've seen her picture. And she was carried off."

THE *Gloria* carried a native and half-breed crew of twelve, or thereabouts, seldom less and often more, all willing to fish shell in anything under eighteen fathoms, and a few that would go below twenty.

Heddon was mate, Raeburn was nothing much, and the other white man was an old piece of some kind of flotsam who, except when fresh from shore, was steady as a main mast, and blow high, blow low, never stuck at anything in the shape of sharp work. He was savage as a wasp if half-way riled and carried an edge on his tongue when good-humored.

Old Wateman wore the *Gloria's* diving armor and waded in where natives would not go; and they could not put up funny stories with him below the water, for they were at times a lazy lot, and called a bed fished out when they were ready to quit.

There was hardly a better man than Wateman at his work. That he stuck with the *Gloria* was a wonder, for many a ship would have been glad to have him. But all he seemed to want was enough to get drunk when ashore; but from the time he returned on board he touched nothing stronger than tea, though that was strong enough to have tanned a dingo's hide. Probably he had something against him in a legal way somewhere and knew when he was well off.

He called himself Tom Wateman. His complexion was much the same as that of a withered potato, all sunburn and wrinkles, with little red-rimmed eyes set in the wrinkles, and his eyes saw everything that was going on and such things as should be and weren't. When drunk he talked loudly to himself, and when sobering he kept himself busy muttering oaths that he would never touch another drop. He was never still a minute, always prowling about, doing something—scrimshawing shell if nothing else; and though he slept little, even then he would fidget and jerk. When awake he was up and after the crew, stepping on their tails, and when ashore he usually had a fight or two.

Somehow he had got it into his head that Raeburn liked him, and this kink grew and curled itself up into such a knot that at last he wouldn't stick his helmet under water unless Raeburn had his hand on the pump. Old Wateman had a dog-like affection for Heddon, who "could whip ary man in the world," but he was never really devoted to Bennings—admired him as a pearler and stood by him when the knocks came pretty fast, but he didn't feel that Bennings had treated his wife proper.

"He ort have done her in—her an' the feller too what stole her."

So, according to Wateman, though in some ways the Old Man was all right, there was that soft streak in him; and this had showed again in having the girl on board:

"When she ort have been packed off to them as knows how to care for womin. No man don't know."

* * *

EARLY as it was in the morning, and wet as it was, old Wateman was on deck raising a smoke with a pair out of the crew over something or other they had done; and the two blacks that were big enough to have breakfasted on him without much loss of appetite took it humbly as whipped pups.

"The nex' time I find a line belayed with an' over-an'-under turn, I'll wear it out on yer hides—both o' ye. It's an over-an'-up turn as does it. Hear?"

He turned and met Heddon with a half-sad, knowing look, blew his nose with pressure of thumb to nostril, looked up and shook his head:

"So he's slipped his cable, eh? I said it soon as I saw the two specks of ye on the beach comin' off. But it's not Tom Wateman that's goin' to tell *her*. I've a'ready piped the crew to be up an' done with breakfus, an' git out their shovels. She was at me twenty times an hour all night, a-wantin' of to know why Raeburn here didn't come back."

Again he shook his head a little sadly. For all of his soft streak, in some ways, Benning had been a man.

"Go down and tell her," said Heddon to Raeburn.

Then to Wateman:

"Never mind the shovels, Tom. No friend of mine that's in need of ease will ever be stowed away in jungle soil. He'll be more at home on the sea bottom, with shell and sea-nymphs about. They, anyhow, loved him well."

"Aye, they did. The luckiest man that way I ever knowed. An' did he speak a word or two about the girl, an' where we should lay her up?"

"Lianfo. Break out your men; I'll go and bring him back. The wind may change. We'll take its slant and be to sea in an hour. Go down and tell her, Raeburn."

Old Wateman, with sturdy rolling trudge of bandy sea-legs, rubber coat trailing about his heels, was already on his way to the forecastle scuttle and he bawled:

"Below there, lay on deck! Break out a stays'l—a new un, —— ye! Never mind the shovels. All hands!"

But Raeburn stood as if his feet had been nailed fast, looked at the dark shoreline through a misty penciling of rain, then back again and up at Heddon—

"I can't, Will."

"Now what's the matter?"

"You know. Let me go bring him. You stay and tell her."

"Not I. Get dry clothes on you. Down a cup of tea. Tell her all men die. She doesn't know that. Below with you."

He put a hand on Raeburn's shoulder, gave him a pinch and a push that pulled his feet loose, and Raeburn started, stooped in under the tarpaulin that covered the hatchway to his quarters and dragged himself below.

He was wet, and that cold there seemed no place for a new shiver to find a place to dance along his hide, but more than one did; and goose-flesh pimples stood out from neck to heels as if some artist who worked on live skin were tattooing chills.

Raeburn shook himself out of wet clothes, threw them at a corner, pawed dry togs from a chest, huddling them on. Then he tapped a stone bottle of rare good rum that Heddon thought he had hid securely by lashing under the slats of his bunk.

In twenty minutes Raeburn was warm as burned toast and heartened to his work; for all men die, and what is death? Sleep. Just that. A long, long rest, and dreamless, for the dead lie still and never move. But there were more thoughts in that rum jug than he needed! Sleep? Not so! Look on the dead. There's something gone. It is an empty house and shows the emptiness. Something has gone, and whatever is gone goes somewhere? Where?

"Likely enough I'll know some day," said Raeburn and started aft.

IV

SHE HAD been the better part of two or three years on the *Gloria* and had never seen more of the cabin than lay under the skylight, or put his foot on more of it than lay from the foot of the companionway to the bulkhead that shut off the quarters used by him, Heddon and Wateman. The times he walked through there had not been much to look at unless Gloria happened to be passing in or out; then she usually said a word or two: "Rather rough, isn't it?" or "A shake-up we're having," or something of the sort, for like a stormy petrel he never passed that way in fair weather.

While Bennings was ashore dying, Raeburn had had rather more words than that on deck with her; nothing much, but enough that he knew she had been at her father to quit the sea. There was a quietness about her, like a swell in a calm, that hinted at a good deal more depth than any diver, in suit or skin, was likely to fathom. Raeburn was a nobody, and she seemed to know it for all that she did not know about men.

He now came into the cabin expecting to stir up old Chang out of his pantry, where he slept on the deck, being a heathen and not needing a bunk, and have him tell her, when she should be awake, that her father was dead.

But there she was, asleep in a chair, right at the foot of the ladder, and as Raeburn started to draw back, like a crab in a crack, she opened her eyes. She had been waiting for him to come.

She sat up with a little daze in her gray eyes, brushed at her forehead with the back of her hand, then threw aside the heavy cloak and was on her feet, gazing anxiously at him.

"Tell me! Tell me—how is he? Tell me!"

All the things Raeburn had planned to say, with softening flourishes of imagery, flew out of his head and he told her in one word.

"Dead?" she repeated blankly, as one does with a word known for a lifetime, often used, too, but has never cracked its shell so the real meaning came out. "Dead? I shall never see my father again!"

"He'll be brought to the ship and buried at sea."

"Dead?" she said again, looking right at him.

Her eyes were gray, darkly gray but full of a pearly luster. She had hair that was almost tawny, not quite, being a shade too dark except in the sunlight, and it was full of curves and waves. In Raeburn's eyes she was no taller than a woman ought to be, though taller than most, and was straight and firm as a young palm. Seventeen, or thereabouts, was the best guess at her age, though she may have been older, but was probably a bit younger if anything, and the tropic heat had flushed her into ripeness. Her complexion was what the sun and wind and salt water had made it, together with such oily lotions as she had from native girls.

Her life had been lonely in that she was much at sea, but there were times when the ship was on and off some island whose people Bennings knew, or in a lagoon with the hook down and these times she was often ashore with the native girls.

"My father! My father!" she said, and putting her hands to her face sat down in the chair again, but did not cry. The way she had spoken was as if she called him.

Old Chang—the —— knew his name; those on the *Gloria* didn't, but had called him Ching Chang and chopped that to Chang—put his leathern head out of the pantry door and stared, then drew back with no questions. He had learned all that there was to learn.

Raeburn stood on one foot, then the other, looked over his shoulder toward the doorway, and was turning to follow his look when she said—

"Wait!"

Then—

"Stay here."

A moment later—

"Oh, my father!" It was a call without an answer, not even an echo.

She stood up. Her eyes were moist as dew. She was very tired from the long night and the new hurt, but she did not cry or crumple, yet her strength was unconscious. She knew what she wanted and would have.

"Wait here," she said, and went into the room, her room, that took in the whole stern curve of the ship.

Raeburn waited. Presently she came out with a southwester on her head and wearing a rubber coat.

"I am going to get my father," she told him, meaning that he was to come with her.

"They are half-way back by now," said Raeburn.

"Tell me, what did he say before he died, and how was his pain? I should have gone last night—I knew I should have gone!"

"The dead feel no pain. And there wasn't much he said, nothing but what showed love for you."

"Come with me. Get on your coat. Come with me."

"You are not going ashore?"

"But I must see them bring my father. I have heard the village women wail for their dead and I did not feel why they should, but now I do. I want to cry out, for I am hurt—it hurts all here."

She put her hand to her throat and drew it down along her breast, looking at him all the while steadily as if he might tell her something of how to ease the pain; but there was nothing he could say.

He went to his quarters and crawled into the rubber coat, still wet, all frayed and cracked, a little better in spots than netting to shed the rain. He came back to her. Then they went out on the deck.

The rain was bouncing along the deck. It struck and broke into frothing sparkles, and foamed along the scuppers.

Six men had their pawls in the capstan and Wateman gave them a chanty of sorts with:

"Around with ye—put yer bellies ag'in' it—what ye huskies gruntin' for—clickety-clank does it—around ye go—dig yer toes in an' quit yer slippin'—ye heave-oh! Ye are better boys than ye look at that. Come on, put yer bellies ag'in it!"

On shore could be seen pigmy forms, carrying something and getting into the boat. A score and more of the villagers, mindless of the rain, were about and took to their out-rigged canoes, paddling along with the boat as it came off. Their coming meant nothing. They were around and over the *Gloria* every day, bargaining and trading.

Heddon came alongside. The long lump, wrapped about in a new sail, was lifted to the deck. Gloria, with the palm of one hand against her cheek, stared without speaking and followed as the men carried the body down into the cabin.

The sail and body were wet as rain could make them, and was soon to be over the side, but now it was stowed below as a kind of gesture of respect to a good man.

"Don't—don't go!" she said as Raeburn started up after the sailors.

"Stay," said Heddon from the top of the ladder, with a downward sweep of hand as if pushing him back.

So he stayed.

There was bustle and shouting overhead, the thud of running feet, old Wateman's sharp voice and shouts from Heddon. With hook and sails a-trip, it was now to be up and away through the lagoon that lay like a whale's mouth, with a thin long coral-toothed lower jaw and a bulking mass of headland.

It was not Raeburn that she had cared about, but the loneliness of being alone. She wanted some one by her.

She did not know what to do. There was no one to show her the forms of sorrow and tell her how a young girl should grieve when she had lost a father. She threw off her rubbers, sat down, stood up, crouched knees down by the thing of canvas, put a soft hand out in a gentle touch and quickly drew the hand away from the harshness of cold, hard, wet cotton.

"Dead. Dead," she said, like one learning a new word.

Then she stood up and was silent.

Raeburn shivered like a headsail in a luff and his clenched teeth seemed jumping in their sockets. The warmth of good rum had gone and left ashes in his blood. For him it was worse than if she had sobbed. Then he would have known that she was easing her pain.

The *Gloria* began to pitch and roll. She had touched rough water, stormily rough at the lagoon's mouth, but tide and a quartering wind were with her and Heddon's hand at the wheel. After five minutes of bucking lunges she cleared the rip and settled down to the heave of the sea; not a bad sea at all, though the *Gloria* rolled anywhere, anytime. It was part of her, that rolling, and they had to take her as she was, or else get off and swim for it—as many a man did, too, before Bennings had ballasted her and put on bilge-keels.

Raeburn sat there in the cabin, a hat between his fingers, water trickling and running about his feet, and a hundred thoughts that weren't at all solemn slipping in and out of his head, though none of them was light colored; and most of all he came back to wondering what lay ahead for Gloria Bennings when with her beauty and her pearls she got out in the world that she knew nothing about. She had wanted to go and now she was free as a bird that had fallen out of its nest.

Chang came out of his pantry with tea on a tray.

Gloria took a cup of tea but pushed aside the toasted crackers, then let the tea grow cold and sipped no more than a spoonful. Her eyes had a kind of soft baffled wonderment in them, with a way of looking full at whatever she glanced at. There might as well have been no corners to her eyes for all the use she made of the corners. With her there were no sidelong glances, no peering from under lowered lids. At whatever she looked she looked straight, as if there was no such thing as a liar in the world. For all that her father had told her of things, especially of men, who couldn't be trusted, she knew no more of what he had meant than a child does of the devil. Now she wanted Raeburn to say why must people die, and what was death? He could not tell her, for his tongue was fumbling and moreover he did not know.

Heddon, tall and broad and straight, with his hat in hand and two big sailors at his back, came down the ladder, and very quietly said to her that the schooner was being hove-to and that her father would have a seaman's burial.

"I would not look if I were you," said Heddon, as the sailors began to unwrap the sail to stow links of chain in the fold at the feet.

But look she did, and when she saw his face she drew back, saying:

"This is not my father! That is not my father!"

"No," said Heddon. "That is not your father, only the shell he wore."

They lashed the body with the marline hitch, raised it in their arms and went up the ladder, following Heddon, with the girl behind and Raeburn last.

The schooner was hove-to. The land was no more than a dark haze, low on the water. Rain came on and on. There was no shelter about the deck. They crowded to starboard, the girl at her father's head, the feet on the rail, the arms of the sailors holding the body and waiting for Heddon's signal.

But something had to be said. No one of them had thought of that before, but there with the dead man's feet on the rail, they felt it; yet there was no one among them that could say a prayer. So they stuck and stood, bareheaded in the rain, waiting for somebody to say something that would release the charm the dead man had cast so that they could not let him go. There was crack and slap and jar among the rigging, heaving upward slant, toppling downward drop of deck and the gurgling slosh of the scupper.

Then Heddon moistened his lips with the rain on his face and said:

"All of the harm that came to him came from the land. The sea loved him. Out of the sea he took his wealth, and when she knew that he was about to leave her, she drew aside and let death have him. So now again we give him to the sea. May he rest in peace."

Heddon moved his hand and the sailors lifted their arms.

Feet first the body took the water and glistened downward.

Then the girl, out of whose head Bennings had kept all that Bible "raffle, and such," put out her hands and said quickly—

"Oh, God, please be good to my father!"

V

IN A day or two the weather changed. Water sparkled along the sides and sunlight poured down all day. At night the Southern Cross swayed across the sky. The night heaven was filled with diamonds, twinkling wickedly like evil little eyes; and as a pearl to a diamond, so was the great full moon that swam overhead to the fretful glitter of the stars that may, as some people say, control the destiny of the earth-born.

Wateman went about with a growl and a snarl for everybody, but there was no bite in any of it. The old fellow felt badly as he drove the *Gloria* along on the last cruise he expected ever to take in her. He tramped about the deck all day and half the night, and when he went to bed muttered to himself; then likely as not got up again, lighted a lantern and overhauled the jimcracks in his chest.

"To leave her, Jack, it's like leavin' some of yerself. —— it, a man's growed into a ship that's been on it as long as I been on her!"

So he would brew himself some tea, black as the ——'s ink-pot, suck at the pannikin when it was boiling hot and gouge at a little teak-wood box he was inlaying with mother-of-pearl. No mere hodge-podge for him; he was an artist of sorts, and putting mermaids, sea-horses, fairy fish and such into the wood, sawing up the shell and matching his pieces in the night hours.

"It's back to the Kulicos for us, lad. Aye, an' we'll take on with some feller that ain't above laying' 'longside of Black McGree an' givin' him ——"

"There are few that'll do it," Raeburn answered.

"Not if Will Heddon's with 'em!"

Black McGree was one of many, and the worst of the lot, that had tried to share in the *Gloria's* luck by hanging to her as if with a tow-line, fishing the same lagoons and banks, watching for a chance to take her unawares.

* * *

HEDDON went about humming to himself, and slept badly. There was no tune to his humming, and now and then he sang. Had he been silent Raeburn would have slept the better many a night.

Now he sat brooding, pipe to mouth, elbows to knees, and hands in the long black hair. In the gloomy lantern light he looked grotesque. The shadows gave his knotted face the suggestion of some not so very remote satyr ancestry.

Out of silence he began humming, the humming grew to mumbling, and presently from far down his throat words came:

> "Full fathoms five my father lies;
> Of his bones are coral made;
> Those are pearls that were his eyes;
> Nothing of him doth fade—
> But doth suffer a sea change
> Into something rich and strange.
> Sea nymphs hourly toll his knell;
> Hark! now I hear them—
> Ding—dong—bell!"

"For heaven's sake, don't let her hear that!"

"Why not, Jack? It's fitting. If I'd have thought I'd have said it yesterday instead of that silly speech I made. That's his epitaph, ready writ. He would have liked that."

"You're worse than old Tom."

"That I am, Jack. I am that," he said sullenly. "I can't get Bennings out of my head. We've fought men many a time for an anchorage over an oyster bed. And now he's down where nothing shorter than a deep sea-line can reach. I've been wondering—what pleasures do the dead have!"

"Time to look about for that when we lie at fathoms five."

"You and I and Wateman'll go aboard some copra schooner at Lianfo, and with shifts from deck to deck beat back to the Kulicos. Then what?"

"Black McGree," said Raeburn.

"Yes, but then what?"

"You and old Tom'll lay aboard him, and I'll cry 'bravo' to cheer you on."

"You're a fool. But after that, then what? Where's it all to end?"

"How do I know? I'm no son of a seventh son. We'll board some pearler and go fishing."

"Aye. And some day there'll be a kink in old Tom's air-line, and we'll haul him up only to throw him over again. You—you'll fall overboard when all boats are lashed fast and take your burial with a curse for leaving us shorthanded. As for me—I'll some day get a knife sheathed in my ribs and be buried in some patch of jungle and have those —— vines stick their roots into me. Old Bennings was right. Life *is* a —— of a thing!"

"But what of her? She's stood the biggest loss of any of us. Not cheerful, but not—not like you."

"Friends are more to a man than father or lover to a woman. She's eager to get off the ship and spread her feathers. In six months she can learn to wear flounces, dance, smile from behind a fan and lie to men. Have you told her yet "

"Yet? Not I."

"Then what the —— have you been talking of, all those hours she's been by you on deck "

"Oh," Raeburn said lightly, and with no truth, "she's asked me to take my meals with her. Says it's lonely, being alone."

Heddon stared with a slow half smile, then impulsively:

"*You* do it! Why didn't I think of that before? There's your chance for a wife. She doesn't know one man from another, and'll think you're as good as the best."

Raeburn groped about his bunk for something to throw, but there was nothing at hand excepting pipe and pouch; so—

"Now who's the fool!"

"You are, if you let her, her wealth, this ship, and all, get between your fingers!"

"She's no such idiot. Besides, she talks a lot of the way you took care of her father."

"Well, you get nothing more to eat on this ship, except out of the cabin pantry! You think because I grin I'm joking—don't you? I am not. You aren't much to look at, but worse than you is good enough for any woman. She's yours for the asking. Then Wateman and I'll charter the *Gloria* from you and you can have our blessings. So now that's settled!"

He threw his feet into the bunk, lay back with an arm under his head and grinned through the smoke at Raeburn.

"It will be a man with some hero in him for her," said Raeburn. "She believes all she has read in books. Thinks stories are facts. There's a lot of novels in that cabin."

"There's a casket of crown jewels, too. And doesn't she ask where she is going? Doesn't she want to know what's to happen to her?"

"You might ask her—'stead of keeping away from her," said Raeburn.

"She's stupid as she looks, with that cow-eyed stare of hers. Doesn't even want to know what's going to happen to her," said Heddon, wilfully bitter. "You tell her tomorrow. Get it over with. Tell her she's an heiress. If she's read novels she'll know what that is. Know too that all the men will think her beauty great as her wealth—they always do, of heiresses. There's no color that brightens a dull woman's complexion like gold."

"She isn't dull!"

"Dull? She's petrified. I haven't heard her say a word a day in three years. Doesn't even ask what's going to become of her!"

"And she is pretty," Raeburn answered almost hotly.

"You call that beauty?" demanded Heddon, sitting up. "Those wide blank eyes? That half-nigger skin? The wild hair? The floppy clothes old Bennings stuck on her? Ho, Jack, you never saw a real woman! There are some that with a half a glance make your blood boil like hot wine. Bad ones, they are; but then the only women that a man really wants are the kind the —— owns. When a devil-woman whistles every man dances on hot coals, at least once in his life. And the fool likes it—while he's dancing!"

"And afterward?"

"If he's really a fool he likes having danced."

Heddon glanced at the clock, saw it was yet within a quarter of an hour of time to relieve Wateman, so he lay back, put his hands behind his head and began:

"Yo ho! for the flag of the cross-boned skull,
And a ship that is black from her truck to her hull,
With twoscore blades, and not a one dull,
To cut the throats of our pris-on-ers!

"Yo ho! for the merry men, hearty and bold—
Hot oaths on their lips that strike a man cold
When they scuttle a craft, then take off her gold
And cut the throats of our pris-on-ers!

"Fine sentiments, eh Jack? Those old pirate fellows had the best of it. Their hearts were no blacker than ours, but the lawmakers have got more guns. So instead of looting galleons we rob oysters. I'll go relieve old Tom."

He put his feet to the deck, straightened up, took a look all round to see if there was anything missing he might want in his pocket, and started out; but with two feet on the ladder he turned toward Raeburn and said:

"You tell her tomorrow. Tell her this Sanborn is an old friend to her father. Tell her she'll have gewgaws and men to play with."

Even in a half-way happy mood there was always something of bitterness on Heddon's tongue, as if in the secret night hours he nibbled wormwood.

IN THE morning Gloria as usual came on deck to see the dawn. She paced back and forth with a long stride, drinking in the cool air, bracing her shoulders to the breeze; head up, face to the wind.

Raeburn was on watch.

Gloria paused in her pacing to watch old Wateman who, at the first twinkling of day, had the crew scattering about with buckets and brushes.

"Wonderful old man, isn't he?" she said.

"Yes."

"He was with father many years."

"Now he sleeps less than ever nights. Says his toes and fingers have grown into the seams of the ship, like roots."

She frowned, doubtful of what he could be talking about.

"It is when he thinks of leaving her," Raeburn explained. "We all leave her pretty soon, you know."

"I did not know," she said, and looked at him full and straight, waiting to be told something more.

"Why, yes. We are going to Lianfo. Your father asked Heddon to take you there—to his old friend, the American Consul. He'll look after you, like a father."

"What," she asked quietly, "is to be done with me?"

"Mr. Sanborn, the consul. He will look after you."

She stared full and straight at Raeburn. There was nothing nervous or hurrying about her. With feet braced to take easily the swaying roll of the *Gloria*, she regarded him for a longer time than he found comfortable. Something seemed to be going on in silence behind her gray eyes.

"What," she asked, still quietly, "is to be done with the ship?"

"Sold, I suppose. Mr. Sanborn will take care of all that."

"And you? Will Heddon? Old Tom? What will you men do?"

"Lay aboard another pearler. It's in our blood—the thrill of prying open oysters."

"And I am to be put in the care of a stranger?"

"He was your father's friend."

"I do not know him. I do not need to be put in anybody's care. I think I should have been told before you started for Lianfo to turn me over to somebody I do not know, that I do not want to know. I am not going to leave the *Gloria!*"

She said it without defiance, quite calmly in fact, which showed how very much she meant it. She did not smile and she did not frown. A handful of loose hair drifted across her face; she shook it back into the wind and waited for what Raeburn had to say.

"But I thought you wanted to get off the sea!"

"I don't want to go out alone among strange people. I will not leave this ship."

"But listen, you can't do that. You can't stay on this ship."

"Why can't I? I have been on a ship all my life."

"But now it's different. You're only a girl and——"

"I am a woman!"

"Woman or not, that doesn't help. Why do you want to stay on the ship? What would you do?"

"As I have done all my life—look for pearls."

"You have enough now. You are rich. And a woman like you can't stay knocking about on a pearler with men like McGree watching out for a chance to make trouble. You a girl alone on a ship—you don't understand!"

"You, Will Heddon and old Tom won't stay with me?"

"But you wanted to get off the sea. You can't stay on a ship, now your father is dead."

"I shall stay on this ship!"

That was that, and the way she said it was enough.

"Oh, Tom!" Raeburn called.

Wateman, barefooted, with trousers rolled knee high on his short bow-legs, paddling about and swearing at the crew, looked aft, growled hoarsely—

"What'd you want?"

"Come here!"

He stared as if doubtful about coming, looked away to port and to starboard to see if anything might be on the water, then came with *plop-plop-plop* of bare feet.

"She doesn't mean to leave the ship, Tom! She says there is no use in making for Lianfo. She wants to go on pearling!"

"Eh?" said old Tom, stopping short and

staring. "What's this? Eh? What's this, Jack?"

"She says she will go on pearling. I tell her it can't be done. You know it can't, Tom. A girl—alone—pearling!"

"I am not a girl!" she said firmly, as if there was something in the word that weakened her position. "I am a woman!"

"Ye're a woman aw right," old Tom muttered, his small, red-rimmed eyes peering at her. "What put that kink into yer, miss?"

"I am at home on the *Gloria*, and anywhere else I shall be among strangers. You men are pearlers, and if you left the *Gloria* you would go pearling again. I was born on the sea and I do not want to leave it. I am not going to leave it."

"Aye, but the reason, the reason, the real reason, miss?" said old Tom impatiently. "Ye was wantin' to be up an' away. Now what's put ye about?"

Gloria flushed a little as if she did not like being disbelieved, but there was no fluttering of gaze or rattle of words. She answered slowly—

"Will *you* leave the *Gloria* because I stay?"

"Not me, miss," said old Tom. "But I'll help carry you offen her an' put ye in good hands. As Jack here says to ye, a pearler's no place for a lone girl."

"But I have no other friends than you men."

Old Tom shook his head:

"Ye can make frien's. An' yer father's ghost'll be comin' up over the taffrail if ye don't do as he wished ye."

"I will stay on the *Gloria*, and if I must I will get other men for my crew!"

With that she turned quickly and went below, going with head up and no glance backward.

"Aye," said old Tom, "she is a womin, an' there's a womin's reason somewhere, mark my word! An' yisterday an' the day before she was jest a child. An' did ye mark the cunnin' of her? It's in their blood. Git another crew, will she? Aye, she knows the three of us would never move aside an' let other ruff'ans have this ship, an' her!"

He drew his pipe, stared into the bowl as if trying to find some fault with it, fumbled for tobacco, found it, took out his knife, then suddenly put knife and tobacco away and went off, sucking on the empty pipe and muttering.

Raeburn went below and found Heddon trying to shave. The water was cold, the soap like grease, the razor dull; he had nicked an ear and was scowling at himself in the small mirror.

"I've told her."

"And I've sworn never to shave again," said Heddon, glaring at himself.

"She says she'll not go off the ship and be with strangers. That all her life she's been a-pearling and she'll keep at it. That we can go if nothing she can say will keep us with her, then she'll get other men."

Heddon did not turn, but watched him in the mirror, sure that he was trying a bad joke; but such honesty as Raeburn's face had, which wasn't much perhaps, showed behind the words. Then Heddon turned slowly, lowering the dull razor—

"She told you that?"

"She did."

"And what did you say?"

"That it couldn't be. That she was but a child. She said, 'I am a woman,' as if that smoothed the thing. 'You are the only friends I have—' she mentioned our three names—I mean, she meant all of us. 'I'm going to keep on pearling.' That's what she said. What she meant I don't know."

"You don't?" asked Heddon suspiciously.

"No."

"If you were just a little better looking, Jack, I'd say she was in love with you. She should have been by now. It's your fault. She said, 'I am a woman,' eh? Well, Jack, that merely means she wants to be made to do what she knows she ought to do. Those who know about such things say that ages ago women were wooed with a club. And they miss it, that club. She wants to go ashore, Jack. But she wants to see how you will take her saying she won't go. Get a club, and by the time we reach Lianfo she'll worship you!"

VI

LIANFO lay before them in the moonlight, with a long palm-fringed arm of the bay sticking out like a siren's gesture to beckon on sailormen.

The passage was safe enough, easy enough, if the ship didn't bump her nose on some of the mushroom coral that lay under water, as a ship was pretty likely to do if a skipper new to the bay tried to go in without a pilot.

"In with her," said Heddon. "We can all swim."

He was not being as reckless as he sounded, though a little reckless at that, because Tom Wateman had been in and out of the bay a few times. But night distances are deceptive and sunken rocks have a way of shifting their bearings, or at least, which is just as bad, of not being where they are expected.

As the *Gloria* drew near, Wateman went forward to con her in and Heddon took the wheel.

Though it was late the three of them, Raeburn, Wateman and Heddon, had been burning tobacco under their noses since sundown, talking of this and that, mostly of the girl, partly of Black McGree.

Raeburn now idled beside Heddon at the wheel.

"What a fool you've been, Jack—with all those pearls in her locker! A verse or two in a sad voice, the blank stare of a dying fish, the soft stroke of your hand on her arm as if rubbing a cat's fur, and it would all have been yours!"

"As you know how, try it yourself!"

"Don't be impudent," said Heddon. "Get into the chains and see if you can keep us off a rock."

For the next half-hour there was little said more than Wateman shouted from forward to Heddon as they glided along under a slant of land breeze that came down from the hills.

The *Gloria* edged her way through with nothing more than one faint scrape to take some of the barnacles off her hull, and came into the bay where a dozen ships, mostly little ones, lay bobbing dreamily on the tide.

A native sailor held a lantern for Raeburn, who had taken a lead into the starboard mizzen chains, and from time to time sang out with a long slow shout in such a way that showed he had learned seamanship elsewhere than on a pearler—

"By the deep four!"

"That's good! Down the jib!" Heddon bawled, then a minute later—

"Let go!"

"Let go!" Wateman shouted raspingly to a man near by.

There was the *tap-tap* of a mallet, a heavy splash, the grinding rush of chain and sparkle of fire in the hawse pipe. The *Gloria* had come to anchor.

It was after midnight, but there was here and there a twinkling of lights on the shore line, and now and then the vague shout of faraway voices.

"What about it, Tom?" asked Heddon. "Shall we go ashore and take some of the roll out of our legs."

"Not me," said old Wateman sullenly, striking a match at his empty pipe.

"You, Jack? Coming with me?"

"What's to be ashore, this time o' night?"

"Moonlight."

"And the madness that goes with it," said Raeburn.

Wateman was pacing back and forth with short bow-legged strides, sucking vigorously on his empty pipe, scowling and tugging at chin and ears, casting shoreward glances without pausing as he trod to and fro. Then the pipe stem snapped between his teeth and the falling bowl skittered along the deck.

"Over with the boat!" Wateman bawled. "The cap'n an' me goes ashore!"

The *Gloria* usually carried three boats. Now she had but one that was sea-worthy. The natives in the Urigo Lagoon had stolen one; another had been badly smashed sometime before on a reef, and Wateman, not having suitable lumber at hand for repairs, had been unable to fix it.

Raeburn, leaning with hands on the rail, watched them go, knowing the restlessness that was in both of them. He had some of if himself but not so much as they, yet he almost called them back to take him too. He would have done just that except for leaving the girl alone.

The gleam of riding lights, like low-lying stars, danced over the black smooth surface of the water, and the moonlight gave a fairy texture to the dim outline of the rigging of dirty little ships scattered about the bay. It was a warm, spicy, bright night.

Lianfo was a copra port, south of the Samoans. Geographers have changed its name out of respect to the white planters who seemed to feel that they would not be so far from civilization if their island had an Anglo-Saxon name.

As with most of the tropic ports that were big enough to be on the map, Lianfo was really two towns; one for the white men who wore whites and drank warm champagne in the shade of the club veranda; and another, far down the beach, where shanty bars were as thick as flies about a dead dog, and white men of a darker hue and harder heads, drank hot gin and with quarrelsome incantation summoned fiends.

The island was full of rich planters, and they had spent money on roads and houses and gardens. The men, being much in idleness, as it was too hot to work, gambled and drank and mumbled scandal; the women dozed, gossiped and danced; and all of them were thrown up against one another in the close companionship of prisoners, for, after a fashion, they were exiles, and lotus-eaters too, rotting away in a kind of idyllic degeneracy, growing rich with imported blacks to do the work, and the world's great need of soap to keep up the price of copra.

HEDDON, always restless, or else darkly moody, had gone ashore, though it was near midnight, to knock about till morning, when he meant to call on the consul and explain Bennings' request.

Heddon knew that he would, too, sometime before he left the island, look up Oxenham. In a way that was grateful rather than friendly, he felt a sort of aloof kindliness toward Oxenham that was not greatly unlike a good-natured contempt, such as reckless natures have for moral cautious men who seem a little stiff of character.

From boyhood, Oxenham had been a fine fellow, severely honest, conscientious, thoughtful, always pondering the nicety of matters to which Heddon, with exuberant impulse, gave no thought at all. They were cousins, of families that were socially prominent at Washington. Oxenham was a fine fellow, but rather a bore; a man to be admired, but hardly liked—yet thoroughly admired, except as a companion.

Old Tom had come ashore but for one thing. Whenever the anchor touched mud, from afar, he could smell whisky. If it was off an island not civilized enough to have a board on two barrels, he was as much at ease as when at sea; but once, even in imagination, his nose was stung with the bitter odor of the dark drink, he turned traitor to himself and gave way.

He and Heddon with scrunching footsteps walked up through the deep white sand. From the beach they could see lights in the Lianfo Club. Leaving the sand, they passed in under the black shadows of thickly clustered palms and the broad arches of the holly-leafed breadfruit.

The night was heavy with the fragrance of flowers. It is well known in the South Seas that frangipani and moonlight are maddening.

They walked about for a time, solitary wanderers in a charmed garden. Sleep, as well as any more mysterious magic might have done, as in fairy lore, had quieted the life of the village. Lights burned in the club, but they saw no one about.

Tom Wateman stood the talk of other things as long as he could, then said:

"This here's prutty an' all, but it ain't what I come ashore for. We'll have to hit out down along the beach."

Far down the beach, well away from the town, on a jut that ran out into the bay, where the better citizens of Lianfo readily conceded the right of its copra seamen and traders to roister and fight as it pleased them, was a slender string of houses and shanties, irregular of alinement, all facing the water from which the stormy men came to take their noisy pleasure, and to which they returned, empty of pocket and often black and blue of head.

These buildings, sagging, unsteady, were a lurching line of huts and shacks, looking as if they might any moment fall down drunkenly as often the men did who came from them. They were of thatch, of rusted sheet-iron, of make-shift wreckage, picked up from every where around the bay.

Beach-combers clustered in them like chilled flies, broken-down, lazy, slyly vicious fellows, almost inactive even in evilness, half-starving rather than working at more than the odd jobs into which they were occasionally stirred by the half-castes and Chinamen who mostly owned the shanties. These fellows loafed about, waiting for sailors who had wages and wasted them.

The beach town was to Lianfo what a tenderloin dump is to a city. Men of self-respect never went there.

The most pretentious and notorious of these gin shanties was not a shanty at all, but a ship, carelessly known among those who came and went as the *Gallows*, though the faded name across the stern, resting high on the sand, could be made out as *Galloway*. It was the rotted hulk of a wrecked bark that a great many years before had come high ashore in a terrific blow behind a tidal surge, when all Lianfo's shipping was badly shaken and much of it, with anchors coming home, stranded. The *Galloway's* cable parted and she went higher on the sand than water had ever come since.

Seamen had looted her with vulturous readiness, and left the carcass to beach-combers who soon began to gather there, huddled in quarrelsome idleness, supporting themselves by getting to sailors, fresh ashore, who bought gin and food and came down to the hulk to have a good time and see the dancing of a fat hag or two.

A Frenchman from nowhere, small, with glittering dark eyes and a sheath-knife's handle showing on his naked breast through the open shirt, came to the hulk, saw its commercial value, and, like a fierce cat among idle dogs, scattered the beach-combers, then set up shop. His success attracted the staggering line of shanties that pretended to rivalry.

Heddon and old Tom, passing from one shanty to another, finding nothing of interest more than the lazy growling of half-drunken men who quarreled without anger, or dozed in the midst of their own nasal rumbling, climbed the ladder of the *Gallows'* stern and went below.

The bulkheads forward and aft had been broken out; Duclos had planned to use the entire lower deck for trade and amusement, but empty cases, boxes, barrels, tins, bottles, the pickings of floatsam, had for a long time been accumulating in an uncared for litter, until rubbish and junk were scattered and piled almost as far aft as the mizzen, near which were also stairs leading to the deck above.

The remaining space was large and had the ring of emptiness in its echoes.

On one side was a long bar, roughly made, its front housed in with odds and ends of lumber, but secure enough to keep thievish hands from reaching in among the bottled goods stowed under the bar. A few tables, many stools and chairs were scattered about, though down the center of the deck was a clear space for dancing. Five or six lanterns hung overhead, but seldom all would burn and often these were smoky, dim, throwing a vague rim of light around the circle of shadow cast by the bottom of the lantern.

Night or day the *Gallows* was never closed, though the girls and Kanaka musicians might sit in idleness, and beach-combers, with nothing to spend, dozed with furtive watchfulness of the waspish Duclos, who might drive them out, or let them stay to await the coming of moneyed sailors that would buy drinks for all.

Duclos appeared to be, night or day, always about and alert. He was uncertain of temper, greedy, vindictive, mean of tongue and quick to fight—with a knife. He had his eye out for money and stopped at no trick. As the owner of a big schooner in the copra trade, got by the profits in bad gin and such, he might have taken a more respectable place in the life of the islands. Respectability did not interest him; and it was thought, not to say known, that his schooner, under a captain named Sanderson, who was suitably a scoundrel, traded heavily with gin and fire-arms among islands where such traffic was forbidden.

He was a small fellow, this Duclos, with bright black eyes, and though in a way fastidious about his dress he had a perpetually unwashed appearance, a certain greasiness of skin that water and soap, if he used them, did not affect. He was quick as a cat and had a sort of slithering, easy, way of moving; and he was seldom polite to a man that he did not mean to knife.

In a vague murmur of mouth to ear undertones his name was linked up with the mutiny of the *Maria Lopez,* a Spanish ship, officered by Englishmen, with a crew of such mixture as a ladle in the ——'s stew pot would dip up. This had happened a dozen years before, but the audacity of the mutineers—four of them had seized the ship—and their ferocity—they had butchered the officers and killed off such of the crew as did not show sympathy, made the tragedy one long remembered in the islands. The mutineers, with so much drunkenness and fighting among themselves, grew short handed, and the *Maria Lopez* went aground up in the Ladrones. It was said that a little dago fiend had led the mutineers and used his knife as if he loved the sight of blood.

Sailors lumped all Latins as "dagoes."

Duclos's name was whispered, though very cautiously, about among the beach-combers as one who probably knew more about the mutiny of the *Maria Lopez* than he would ever tell; and this was not only because he was a Latin and used a knife, but Black McGree had once taunted him with being that same "dago fiend." There were those who said McGree was not afraid of the —— himself; others that he feared Duclos.

WHEN Heddon and Wateman came down into the *Gallows* their coming was not noticed.

Heddon stopped at the foot of the stairs and looked all about. The bark *Galloway*, when blown ashore, had landed stern on and stuck with a list to port and pretty sharp down by the bows. Duclos had ripped out the lower deck and made it level. The result gave an odd sensation on entering; the two decks were not parallel and the "ceiling" was much lower forward than in the stern, and many sailors, more or less sober too, would look about in uneasy puzzlement the first time they came down into the *Gallows*.

Now ten or twelve persons were in the room, and three or four of them were women, native girls, rather flat of face, darkly cow-eyed, thick-lipped, half-naked. One woman was white, thin, angular, scrawny, with a sort of savage hunger in her countenance, a premature hag; she was as coarse of tongue as any beach-comber, as husky of voice. The native girls were afraid of her, as were, too, some of the men. She had a crippled foot, or a broken leg, something that gave her an emphatic limp. She was known as "Old Shanghai Ann," though there was not a gray hair in her head, but she had been in the beach town for a year or more.

Everybody was now gathered at a table near the 'midship stairs; some were sitting, some standing, all bent forward attentive to a heavy voice that went on excitably high-pitched, strained with importance. A sailor with sleeves rolled above his elbows, showing powerful, hairy, sunburned arms covered with splotches of tattoos, listened with interest, occasionally glancing away with interest toward a dimly lighted part of the deck more forward, almost among the litter of cases and barrels.

The two kanaka musicians, holding their guitars and mandolins by the necks as if to strangle them, continually raised on their toes, the better to hear across the shoulders of the men before them. The musicians did not much care what was being said, or whether or not they heard, since their English was pretty crude and they understood little; but they paid the compliment of listening to a voice that was keeping them from work.

Sanderson, Duclos's captain, was there; short of legs, heavy of body and face. He looked half-drunk when sober, and was never drunk. A thick-headed fellow, but unsocial, dully secretive, unscrupulous. He had once been captain on a four-master, so he was a competent seaman. But he had lost his vessel on the rocks, had lost his berth and fallen down to an island schooner. People wondered that so good a sailor could fall so low, but Duclos evidently knew the secret and profited by it. The cunning of Duclos fitted into the chunky body of Sanderson and gave it the sort of brains with which, after a fashion, a man could make money in the island trade.

Duclos himself was there, sitting at the table, now quiet though he was much given to flitting gestures. His dark greasy face was covered with a black fuzz which was never shaven and which never grew. He wore a black sash around his narrow waist. He had a thin, sharp, straight nose, thin nervous lips that moved restlessly, constantly, almost twitching. In a rage, he would draw his lips back over his teeth, as even and as white and almost as pointed as a cat's.

When he had first come to Lianfo he carried his knife on his breast, under his shirt, as if he had been used to wearing it furtively; but with increase of fortune, he wore the knife—the same knife too, black of handle, eight inches of steel and double-edged—in his sash. His temper was short at any time, trickily explosive. Vindictiveness was nearly his mania. He boasted excitably that he never forgave an injury, and that he had never failed to pay a grudge.

It was very well known among the beach-combers, however, that there was one debt, and a bitter one, that as yet he had failed to pay; but no one mentioned this in Duclos's hearing; more than that, no one who had the least fear of Duclos spoke in his hearing the name of Black McGree. A film of froth would be in Duclos's lips when he had finished cursing that roistering giant, whose temper was as uncertain as any man's, and who more than most men was heedless of what people thought of him.

McGree, a picturesque bear of a man in size and strength, had once laid a bottle over the head of Duclos's bartender for some minor reason or other, and Duclos, with a rippling flash of movement, had thrown his knife. It missed McGree's throat by an inch or two; and Duclos, apparently too astonished to move—since he could cut the center of a playing-card at ten paces—stood motionless until too late even to squirm. The powerful McGree grabbed him, lifted him, shook him, raised him as if to beat his brains out against a beam, and in raising him struck a lantern. McGree's rage went out quick as a light would have vanished under his breath. He laughed suddenly, his great body shaking in mirth, and holding Duclos in the grip of one enormous hand, reached up, detached the lantern from the spring swivel-hook, and, bunching Duclos's sash in the middle of his back, raised and hung him there, face down, toes down.

"If they had the captain like Salvador McGree on that *Marie Lopez,* see, little rat, what would have been done to you? A-ha!"

Black McGree for that night took charge of the *Gallows*, drinks were free and the musicians panted, while Duclos screeched curses that would have chilled the blood of sober men, and no one dared to help him down until McGree, tired of his fun, had gone from the *Gallows* with unsteady footsteps that shook the stairs under their weight.

McGree came often to Lianfo, but he had never revisited the *Gallows* and never remained ashore after dark. But some people explained this by saying that it had been McGree's habit always to get on board his ship before sundown since the time his crew had stolen his schooner and made off, never to be heard of again.

Now Duclos sat listening to what the beach rat had to say of the half-drunken man who lay face down on the distant table near the 'midship stairs.

The beach-comber, in narrative glee, was saying:

"—up there by Chink John's shanty I heard, 'T' —— with ever'thing!'

"That's what I heard, an' I looks around, just like you or me or anybody would. An' see *who* it is. I says to meself, 'Great jumpin' mackeral—*him!*' That's just what I says to meself for I c'd see he was half-seas over.

" 'What's wrong, mate?' I sings out, not lettin' on I knows who he is, or anything, y'see.

" 'Ever'thing,' says he.

" 'A shot or two o' the old stuff 'll put all that to rights,' I tells him, wondering what the —— he could be doin' down here, when they got plenty of the real old thing up there in the club. Champagne an' ever'thing. 'But come along,' I tells him, taking his arm. Ho, ho, it was funny!

" 'Don't touch me!' says he, drawin' back like this, y'know, as if I was dirt.

" 'Just givin' you a hand, mate,' says I. An' I asks him, 'Where you headin'?'

" 'To ——,' says he, earnest-like as if he'd paid for his berth.

" 'You've laid the right course to fetch up there,' I comes back. 'Just keep right on, another hundred yards.'

"He straightens up, or tries to, an' gives me the cold stare from ears down an' back again, an' him hardly able to stand on his feet. Oh it was funny! I wished you fellers could have saw it!

" 'Anything I can do to help?' I asks, polite-like you know.

" 'Yes,' says he, straightenin' up an' swayin' about. 'Yes sir, there is.'

" 'Out with it, mate,' I tells him.

" 'You are familiar with this—er community?'

"That's what he give me! An' I comes back with—

" 'You bet! I know ever' empty bottle on the reef, an' who killed it!'

" 'Ah,' says he, lookin' at me owl-eyed. 'Strange knowledge. Remark'ble. Won'erful. Unh.'

"Then he waits a minute, lookin' at me hard, an' me thinkin' ever' minute he's goin' to topple. But he don't. It's *me* that nearly does the topple when he says—

" 'You know all the ladies down in this part of the—er—commun'ty?'

" 'Ever' hair on their head!' I says, thinkin,' 'What the ——? A man like *you,* down here.'

" 'I'm lookin' for the wors' woman on Lianfo. I want to meet the wors' white woman on Lianfo.'

" 'What you want of her?' I says as soon as I can get back my mind.

"He says, so help me! he says—

" 'I want ask her to do me the honor—ver' great honor of becoming my wife!'

"I don't speak right away. I'm all took aback. Then I says—

" 'You want to what!'

" 'Marry her—un'erstand? Marry her. Take her home with me. Marry her!'

" 'You don't need do that,' I tells him, thinkin' he's just plain drunk.

" 'I know I don't need to—I want to.

Un'erstand? Wors' one. I'm going to marry her. I'll know *she's* no good, then I won't be dis'pointed. Won't be fooled. I'll know what *she* is, un'erstand? This ver' night, I'll marry her. I made up my mind do it, and I came. Any 'sistance you can give will be 'preciated, greatly. But I want the wors' one, un'erstand? Wors' white woman on Lianfo. If I had time I'd fin' wors' one in the world, but one from down here may be bad 'nough. What you think?'

"I told him I thought he could get just about what he wanted down here—no need to look all over the world. I thought I'd play him along an' have some fun, but he was all dead set for marryin'. I couldn't get out o' him what had put that kink in his cable—he said, 'Private reasons,' but, he said, his 'tentions were honor'ble.' I nearly broke a rib laughin'.

"Then I thought what a —— of a good joke it would be if we could get him spliced up with old Ann here somehow, an' I steered him straight here.

"You heard him, all you heard him say he wanted to marry her if she'd have him. Have him! Oh, ho, ho!

"That extra drink or two we threw in him seems to have put him out. But that's the lay. Let's get him an' Ann here spliced tighter than the —— can pull. I knowed Duclos here could figure out a way. An' —— what a joke! Old Ann'll be right up with the best s'ciety. Blast me if I don't think he means it an' just got hisself drunk enough to go through with it. What you say, Ann?"

"Ann-ee says yees!" Duclos answered softly, then laughed noiselessly. His laugh was like the yawning of a cat.

Duclos looked for a moment at the table in the shadows. His lips twitched slightly with meaningless smiles, but the gathering of wrinkles at the corners of his eyes showed that he was pleased.

Ann sat at the table with a cigaret between fingers that lightly touched a mug of beer. The cigaret was dead, the beer stale. She had listened with face half-turned from the beach rat, but from the corners of her eyes watched him. Her famished face was nearly expressionless, touched with a sneer.

When the beach rat had told his story, there was the rattle of laughter and disconnected words. Some one slapped Ann on the back—

"There 's luck for you, old girl!"

"That thing we will do!" said Duclos, looking at her sharply. "Marry you, an' he is rich! What do you say, Ann-ee?"

Ann stared toward him, the sneer deepening on her face; then, hoarse-voiced:

"You can't make it too soon for me. An'—" savagely—"I'd like to see him get rid o' me, too!"

"That's the girl, Ann!"

"Don't fergit yer ol' friends, Ann."

"Be right up with the swells, you will!"

"All silks an' lace f'r you, Ann!"

Coldly she answered the last speaker:

"Oh I know what silk an' satins is. I've wore 'em. I'm good enough for him."

"You bet, Ann!"

"Too good!"

"You'll hold yer own with the best of 'em, Ann, you will!"

The voices were insolently ironical, mocking her under meaningless congratulations. She half knew it, but was outwardly calloused. She knew men. The trace of a sneer was what she hid behind. She had learned wisdom where wisdom is taught, and nothing else; and the price of its learning is loss of virtue and virtues, loss of beauty, of health and heaven.

"But who'll marry 'em?" said a voice in disgust.

"The mishies won't, nor the magistrate!"

Painful remarks followed regarding the scruples of missionaries and the magistrate.

"Leave it to Duclos! He'll find a way, won't ye, Duclos?"

Duclos shifted his eyes to the hairy face of the man who had praised him, then looked across at his captain, Sanderson, stolid, heavy as if half-drunken—but always sober.

"Aye, leave it to Duclos."

"Aye——"

All eyes were on the small Frenchman, or at least French he called himself; and he looked quickly from face to face.

"——!" said Duclos suddenly, throwing up one hand, flashing out the other as if offering what they wanted in its palm. "We'll take him to sea! Sanderson here has a master's papers. We'll marry 'em tonight. Get back in the morning. Sandee—" Duclos's name for his captain—"there will be a what-you-call him—honeymooners on your ship. We'll go on board an'—" a sweep of hand illustrated—"out to sea. Then back, an' Ann-ee here will go at the club for wedding breakfast. And hold reception. Ha, it is done!"

He flung both hand palm upwards in the air, darting his eyes about.

A fist or two smote the table in approval, some men laughed, others cursed cheerfully. The native girls giggled.

Shanghai Ann sucked her dead cigaret and with squinting narrowness of eyelids looked steadily over the heads of those about her. The sneer was gone. Her thin, gaunt, famished face was set in hard lines as talk went on in sentences broken up by jerky laughter, the lifting and sipping of tin mugs and clatter as they were carelessly dropped to the table. Then, coming suddenly out of thoughtfulness, she struck her palm down on the table, and glaring defiantly about her, cried:

"I'll sure do it! I'll show 'em! I'm not worse than half the women up there—" she pointed angrily in the direction toward the respectable town—"not bad as half of 'em! I never pertended to be nothin' but what I am. They do! I'll show 'em. I'm a whore, a —— beach whore, but I never pretended to be nothin' else. He wants to marry me, I'll marry 'im. He knows what he's gettin'. I know what I'm gettin'. An' you hear this, you bums, I'll make him a —— good wife, I will!"

In an ecstacy of amused applause feet stamped and shuffled, fists banged, deep voices jokingly boomed:

"Good girl!" "That's the talk!" "You're all right, Ann!"

To hear her talk was almost as good a joke as the marriage itself. Even the dull Sanderson grinned under his thick straggling mustache, eying her half furtively. Duclos laughed with open mouth and no sound.

TO BE CONTINUED

POMP AND POWER

by J. D. Newsom

BAPTISTE KRAKRÉ was taken to France in the year 1869 and exhibited at the Anthropological Institute and other learned societies where his skull and his nasal index were measured and the shape of his molars discussed. He was a bright boy and picked up a good deal of French during these sessions, and because he was an object of much curiosity he met a great many of the celebrities of the day, among others Napoleon III, who shook hands with him.

Baptiste had no sense of proportion. At home, in the wilds of New Caledonia, he himself was the son of a great chief and he accepted the white Emperor's hand clasp as a mark of perfect equality. He became a nuisance and at last was sent back to the Pacific.

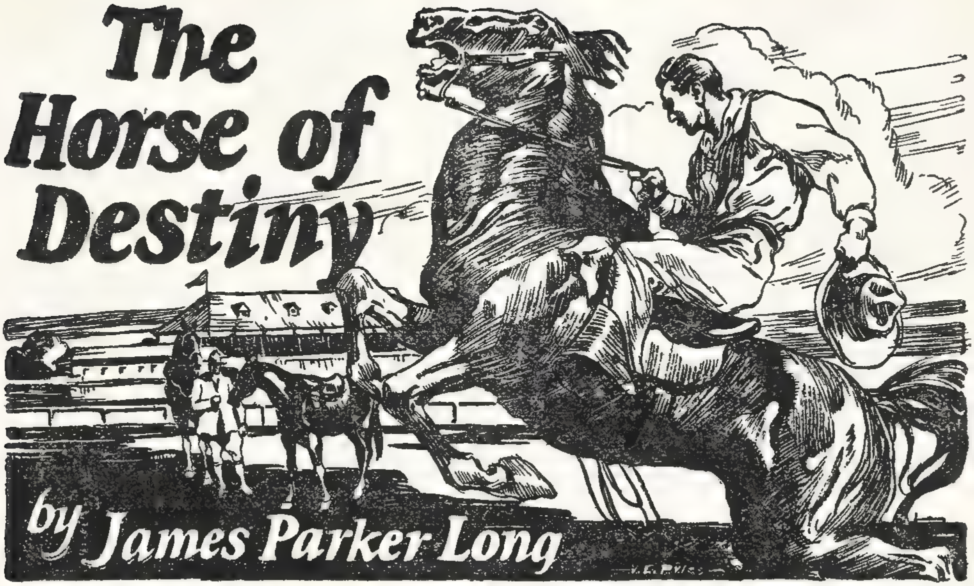
In his absence his august father had sold a thousand acres of choice arable land to a planter and in exchange had received a keg of bad rum, a hussar's uniform, five pounds of tobacco and a pair of shoes. Baptiste called on the planter to protest; the planter kicked him out. Baptiste then went to law and metaphorically got kicked again.

So he wrote to Napoleon III, but the latter had by that time dropped out of history through the Sedan trap-door, and the letter went astray. He waited almost a year and tried very hard during that period to speak drawing-room French to ex-convict settlers. I suppose he suffered a good deal, for he finally revolted and his tribe followed suit. As the saying goes the insurrectionists got it in the neck. Baptiste and his father were shipped to the New Hebrides to expiate their crime and the tribe was transplanted to another district and broken up.

At the expiration of his ten years' sentence Baptiste came home. He was then the Big Chief, for his father had died of malaria. He was the Big Chief, but he had no tribe and he was permitted to settle down among strangers who spoke a different dialect and resented his presence. He grubbed along somehow or other, and became a good Christian so that he might work in the missionary's garden and steal enough food to keep him alive.

When I met him he was a very old man indeed and he lived mainly in the glamorous past. He spoke of Napoleon III and begged me if I had any influence to speak to His Majesty and remind him of the plight of his friend. I had not the courage to tell him the Emperor had been dead forty years.

The Horse of Destiny



by James Parker Long

"One white foot, buy him.
Two white feet, try him.
Three white feet, deny him.
Four white feet and a white nose,
Knock him on the head and feed him to the crows."

THE out-at-elbows barn and sheds which formed two sides of the paddock and the untidy, but beautiful dark-green leaves and pinky-purple blossoms of the burdocks lining the outside of the high wire fence enclosing the other two sides, served most effectively to set off, by contrast, the physical perfections of the horse at whom the rimed slur was directed.

In the sunlight the young stallion's coat flashed like freshly minted gold and the straight, flat legs in their snow-white stockings moved with an india-rubber-like ease and sureness which should have brought the light of awed admiration to the eyes of the two sober-faced men who draped themselves over the fence and watched the virile creature working off the energy stored within his deeply ribbed barrel by a night of stall-fed inactivity.

One instant the matter of importance was a race with his shadow and Childers fled across the too closely cropped turf with a mighty drumming of unshod hoofs and ended with a graceful, feline swerve at the fence to evade the crash which seemed inevitable. Back he came, stiff legged, with short dancing steps, fine, sharply chiseled head and molasses taffy tail high and with flaring nostrils like twin crimson velvet-lined funnels, snuffing and snorting with the joy of his brimming life.

In a world of horses bred for beauty and for grace and efficiency of movement it did not seem possible that greater perfection could exist, but the great privilege of being the only spectators at this demonstration of what nature and man in collaboration can achieve did not cheer the glum faces above the blue-overalled figures by the fence.

"Wall, there ye have him, George. Five years old, kind ez a kitten, sound ez a dollar, ain't never been hitched, so dang hossy that the old man was afeard to tackle him, and pussonally I ain't hossman enough to resk spoiling so likely a piece of hoss-flesh."

If Childers could have talked this would have been his cue to have interjected:

"Liar! How about that breaking-harness that I tore to dogmeat last Saturday?"

Since, however, speech was one attribute which an unusually beneficent Deity had withheld he went on with his morning's exercise, flowing from one statuesque posture to another as he feigned fear at some imaginary beast, shied, reared and raced madly with giant, frictionless strides toward the gate, snorting his terror, till a succulent bit of clover attracted his attention.

George—horse-trader from the soles of his manure-daubed shoes to the crown of his battered near-Stetson—said nothing.

His business there was to buy as cheaply as possible, and well he knew the value of a judicious silence. He merely shifted to the other hip, pulled another spear of timothy to take the place of the one that was so nearly masticated and, since Jabe Clark could not see his eyes, permitted a little of his admiration to creep into them as he observed anew the stallion's mighty loins and short, fine cannons.

"I wisht the old man was alive to tell ye about that hoss," Jabe went on when it became obvious that the burden of the talk was upon him. "That hoss is pure-bred on both sides. He's sired by that Morgan that the Government had one year down to the village, and he's out of that speed mare that the old man had, and she was half registered Arabian and half standard, seeing as how she was sired by Chimes."

"Sure. I got you. By your own tell that makes this one a pure-bred mongrel. Well, what do you want for him? I ain't denying that I maybe could find a place to sell him, and just so long as the mail-order houses sells rawhide mule-skinners for three and a half there ain't no hoss that's too hossy for George Klug. But you better be easy on the price because when a horse like that has been let go till he is growed and fed up like this feller you are taking a big chance. They're so dum stout that ye gotta be ha'sh with them, and a hoss with a broken leg ain't worth nothing to me."

The question thus opened was speedily settled and, since one man was eager to sell and the other to buy, it was not long before George was on his way down the road with the halter stale in his hand and the jewel in horse-flesh dancing at his heels.

So ended the first period of the life of Childers. Born of royal blood, it had been his great good fortune to be owned by old Jerry Clark whose religion was the same as Darrel's. "In the resurrection God'll mind the look of your horse." All during his colthood and until maturity it had been his master's happiness—after a long and busy life, waning now in poverty-stricken isolation—to give this, the most promising colt of his breeding, every opportunity to develop into the horse God had intended him to be.

Drawing from his father the compact frame and ivory-like bone of the Morgans, he had received from his mother the speed and rugged constitution of her sire and the fire and bottom of her desert-bred mother. His legacy from all lines would have explained the existence of an unusual horse but here was something more. Given parallel or identical breeding, once in a generation an animal will stand out as of almost incalculably greater value to his owners and the future of his race than any other. Such a horse was Justin Morgan, founder of the race that bears his name and the name of his owner. Such a horse was Jean le Blanc, to whom in no small part is due the credit for the excellence of that race of great, smooth-legged, heavy-thewed creatures who bear the name of the valley in which he was born, Percheron. Such a horse was the great, gray, imported Messenger whose sons and sons' sons founded the race of trotters and pacers which is so peculiarly an American institution.

Such a horse old Jerry had felt was this colt from the first instant that he had staggered to his feet and nickering, nudged the side of his mother.

* * *

IN ONE sense it was Childers' misfortune that his master had been so sure of his fitness to found a line of fast and rugged horses. If he had not it may well be that the colt would have gone the way of the others bred upon that farm, been trained for the plow, the sulky or the saddle, from birth and, when bone and sinew were hardened, taken up his share of this earth's labor. Thus he would have met his destiny in softer guise with no hint of tragedy save the loss of Heaven-sent material.

Instead, submission to the halter was the only lesson this beauty was asked to learn, and learn it he did, willingly and with no divided mind. For the rest he had but to eat the choicest grain and hay that the old man could provide, and during this last year who knows how the struggle properly to care for this scion of royalty may have cut into the funds which should have cared for the man himself!

Then, too, there were long talks when Jerry sat in the pasture, talking to his prodigy, whispering to him his hopes for his future greatness as one would talk to a son in whom lay great promise.

At the end of it all came a blank. The old man no longer visited the paddock with his votive offerings of fruit and vegetables. Instead there was a hard-eyed grandson whose hand was sparing with the oat-measure, who had no confidences but instead muttered maledictions at this creature who was wasting energy that might better have been expended at the plow.

Then it was that Childers found how great his loss had been when the beloved Jerry left him. The grandson made one attempt to train him for the tasks of the menial farm slave. Childers stood, obedient and pliant to his will, while straps were buckled and breaking-cart attached. He still stood when all was ready, with no comprehension of what was desired till touched by the stinging lash. Then, goaded by the insult of the blow or by the realization of what was intended, he became for the moment a wild horse and kicked himself out of his harness.

It is true that friction upon the trunks of convenient apple-trees assisted with some of the more stubborn straps, but the point is, he speedily and efficiently freed himself of them all while Jabe, white-faced and shaking, picked himself up from the ground and watched his gyrations with more hate than ever in his heart.

George Klug was the local horseman. He bought, sold, broke and trained horse-flesh of every description, but he, too, lacked the seeing eye. To him a horse was a horse. He did not know that this proudly stepping creature behind him was a miracle, one of those rare individuals who combine all that is best of his own race with perhaps a trace of some faculties from the man who had for so long treated him almost as an equal.

George had grown up in a hard setting, and it is the terrible thing of hard lives that they make hard men, and hard men are bad for their women and their animals. To him a horse was a physical machine. That there might be such a thing as a soul within that cloth-of-gold coat behind him, he would vehemently have denied. Since he never yet had had occasion to deal with a miracle his reasoning was yet untested. Childers had gone three years past breaking-time. He would be set in his way. Harsh means were therefore best, since quickest.

In the ten-acre field behind his barn Childers was introduced to the infernal appliance devised by the great French horse-trainer, Galvayne, for breaking the spirit of too proud horses. A stout rope was braided into the beautiful, flowing tail, his head was drawn to his side and tied to this rope. A flick of the lash stirred him to activity but, thanks to his strained position, one course only was open, the circular one; he literally must follow his tail. With cigar alight and long, black mule-skinner in hand, George followed the leaping, whirling creature, keeping him to his work.

Always an exception, Childers failed to play his part. Instead of lunging distractedly about till he fell from dizziness or stood swaying on straddled legs, Childers made perhaps a dozen wild whirls and then stopped. George applied the whip with all the energy and cruelty of the small-souled. With that grit which would have carried him victorious to the end of a hard-fought race or borne a loved master in safety through deadly peril had fate decreed differently, Childers stood and took such punishment as his master cared to deal out while the veins stood out, cord-like, on satin, sweaty skin and muscles twitched at elbow-point and cheek.

There is no need to relate in detail the history of Childers' next three months. There are many horsemen in our country and each has his own infallible method of horse-breaking. So decisive was Childers' refusal to yield to these various systems and so extreme was the dislike of these various gentlemen for having a horse in their stables who defied their best efforts, that Childers traveled far.

His life was not unpleasant. Every few days he was led to a new place. There would come a short period of torture, thanks to the attachment of various harnesses which either threw and held him for various lengths of time on the ground in undignified helplessness or which he was able to discard by the use of such struggling, such kicking and striking as had never been seen and which became proverbial.

Then there would come quiet, peaceful, well-fed days with regular exercise in grassy paddocks. A horse that is destined for immediate sale can never complain of neglect.

One wonders if ever in those days there came any memory of long, idle days with old Jerry while the man told him of the great races he was to run and the family he was to beget to make his name glorious?

Strangely, Childers' disposition remained the same. The light in his limpid, wide-set eyes never turned malignant and, save when he fought, his ears still played forward over high, proud and inquiring head. Always he was willing and eager to meet man as a friend, never as a master. He was not Childers now. Men, nowadays, have forgotten flying Childers, the old thoroughbred, whose blaze and gleaming white stockings had led Jerry to borrow the name for his new prodigy. Now he was "the Outlaw" and his chance of ever founding a family was ever growing less and less.

Men believe, and with reason, that the horses which shall sire the next generation should be those who best serve in this day. Men also hold, and so firmly rooted is their belief that laws have been passed to lend force to it, that horses of pure ancestry, bearing within them the accumulated force of generations of the same kind, generous, breeding are of the greatest value to posterity. The rule is, "Like produces like or the likeness of some ancestor." If a horse and his ancestors are alike then one may look with confidence for colts from him who bear the imprint of his size, conformation and action.

Poor Childers was doubly outlawed. Not only was he not serving well, but he bore no unmixed blood-line to hand down. Men do not look for that divine spark which has never been explained, in spite of learned talk of favorable "nicks," of throw-backs and the like, in despised "swapping-stock." They search for it, laboriously and with great expenditure of time and money in the frames of horses of achievement. Is it any wonder then that Jerry's hopes were doomed to disappointment?

Every year the Government of this country holds what is called its "Endurance Contest." Horses entered must carry weight the equivalent of a cavalryman and his equipment, must travel sixty miles a day for five days and at no time must show distress or weakness of any part. Hard though this contest is on the horses, it is no less grueling for the riders. Always the site of the test is haunted for months beforehand by men and horses toughening themselves for the ordeal. Among these men are always horsemen whose boast is that they can ride anything that they can "fork."

What more natural than that in due course one of the succession of Childers' owners should start him in that direction. There were riders fit, if any, to master him. There were men eager to buy horses which might be expected to stand up under the grind. Here was a horse to whom the test would be child's play, if one might judge from testimony of drawn-wire tendons and perfectly functioning heart and lungs.

WILKESVILLE, the home of many speedy trotters and pacers, with its breeding establishments, its fair ground and its private tracks, lay in the very center of the course mapped for that Fall. At the Wilkesville Stock Farm were housed a dozen Western entrants with their riders and caretakers. These were lean men and hard, knees spread with saddle-bulge, cheeks distorted by tobacco and bodies composed of some blending of rubber and whalebone. At their head was one Roberts, who was indistinguishable from the others till something went wrong. Then he was the one who efficiently and laconically restored order.

Over the telephone Roberts agreed to his part.

"Sure I'll ride him. Tickled to death! I haven't sat a good twister for a coon's age. Send him over today and I'll take him out for twenty, thirty miles and see what he's got in him."

"You're my last chance. He has been tried by nearly every other method and given up as unbreakable. If you or your men can't break him, will you see that he is killed and buried?"

"Sure. But we won't need to kill him. If he stays alive, one of us will ride him. If he dies, he has found the only way to beat the game."

Roberts went out to look at the buildings and the stock, and the great oval that was the private track where the race prospects of the Wilkesville Farm were trained. They were off on the circuit and now the only horses he was likely to see were the less promising young ones or a cripple or two getting their exercise, unless Peter's Orloff, that grand old race-horse who heads the Wilkesville stud, came out for his daily ten miles.

A band of placid, sleek-coated mares and colts inside the oval was Peter's harem. Every one of the mares could look back on a history of fast and hotly contested races and a recital of their names would stir any one who ever sat in a grandstand and saw an evenly contested heat fought out to the last inch. But they were not all. Many canny horse owners are happy to be allowed to pay the price of a good automobile to have a colt in their stables sired by Peter.

Therefore their best mares, by breeding or achievement, had been shipped to him and now are scattered once more through a score of farms. One mare, the queen of them all—Lou Manning, for three years the champion race-mare—had just been returned from Louisville. Her third season had been her greatest but her last. Flesh and blood traveling at the rate of thirty miles an hour on its own legs is taking risks. A collision, a wrench, and the head lines in the "Harness Horse Press" announced:

LOU MANNING RETIRED TO THE STUD

Premier Race-Track Mare Injured and Shipped to Join the Band of Matrons at Wilkesville

The report went on to name over the long list of horses whose blood had combined to make her what she was: Peter the Great, George Wilkes, Electioneer, Ambassador, Almont, Hambletonian, Messenger, Mambrino Paymaster—names which meant nothing to the uninitiated but were sweetest music to the throngs of horse-lovers who had stood on their chairs and howled themselves hoarse as, time after time, the little black mare had shot from the pack with her almost unbelievable burst of speed and snatched victory in the last stride.

Inside the basement of the big barn there was semi-darkness, coolness and a most entrancing blending of odors. The resinous smell of fresh planer-shavings from the bedding predominated but there was a not unpleasant acrid ammoniac undertone; there was a higher suggestion of well-oiled harness, and, mixed all through, the intriguing hint of hay, green and palatable. About the few occupied stalls were busy cowboys, rubbing down endurance-contest prospects who had just come in and saddling another squad who had still thirty miles to do before night.

Out of the end stall was lead a glossy black mare. Almost tiny she looked beside the heavier framed Morgans of the saddle squad, but when one stood beside her it was apparent that no small part of that appearance was due to the perfection of her proportions and to the ease and grace of her motions. As docile and intelligent as a trusted, companionable dog she followed the exercise boy who led her out.

It was Lou—the last word in race-horse flesh. With her long list of turf triumphs ended and definitely behind her she was on her way to meet Peter and make history of another sort. In the breeding-paddock were already gathered the prosperously gold-watch-chained owner and the withered gray trainer of the Wilkesville string who had hurried back from Louisville for this important occasion. With them were reporters and special writers from the race horse publications, for all horse-lovers were interested in and hopeful of this memorable mating.

From the stallion house beyond came a trumpet-like greeting from Peter and out he came, crest arched, heavy mane tossing as he pranced forward, front feet merely tapping the earth at intervals between joyous plunges.

Happy horse! Hailed by all the world as worthiest to pass on his paramount physical and mental gifts and aided to make the most of them by being mated to such a band of females as had never before been brought together. This was where Jerry Clark had hoped Childers might some day be. Poor old Jerry! Poor old Childers—facing a struggle with nothing ahead but death, for no one who had ever watched him could doubt that he would die before he would submit!

Wait a moment! What was this? From beyond the stout, paled fence came an answering trumpet, higher pitched and with something savage in its resonance. Peter screamed defiance. The king had earned his place by triumphant masculinity beyond others of his race, but even to his friends the challenging answer which came back was more virile, more awe-inspiring.

Now, through the palings Childers could be seen, fighting for his freedom, dragging a burly attendant who snatched and jerked at the punishing stallion bridle on his head without effect. If Peter had been a wonderful sight as he caracoled into the enclosure in the sureness of his right, what could have been said of this flashing gold and white stranger who thrust aside his attendant so lightly and sprang at the nine foot fence so confidently.

"No need to worry. That fence is horse-high and horse-proof."

But was it? Possibly for any other horse than Childers! His twelve hundred pounds struck so near the top that a whole section of the fence collapsed and inside, in the tangle of broken boards, was the golden stallion, bounding to his feet and leaping with short, challenging squeals toward the black.

Peter had already forgotten Lou and the softer side of life. Answering scream for scream and squeal for squeal he fought for his head and won it. Then the two great creatures sprang together, ears pasted back till their long necks and lean heads menaced, snake-like. Loaded crops had struck and been ignored. Men were racing for ropes, for guns, for pitchforks, but little cared the two great male creatures as they reared and struck, boxer-like, unshod hoofs cutting and tearing even as did racing-plates.

Peter was a great horse but he was not a horse of destiny. It was as if Childers had lived his life for this moment. Once, twice, three times his gleaming teeth tore at the side of the black's throat, and now Peter's Orloff was bleeding a crimson flood that spurted. His screams grew weaker and no longer could he present a saving defense. The great golden breast, bloody and scarred but unweakened, struck him and he went down.

What of Lou? What were her thoughts as she beheld this struggle of equine giants for her favors? Who can say? But if one may judge from actions it may well be that she was pleased and flattered. The instant the black collapsed Childers turned to her, and before the ropes, the pitchforks and the guns had returned, before help had come to the bleeding wounds of Peter's Orloff, the golden horse had triumphed in love as he had in battle.

One wonders whether old Jerry Clark was where he could watch the fulfillment of thus much of his hopes and prophecies?

That picture should be the last. The great untamable stallion taking by force that place for which nature had designed him and which man would have denied! But that was not the end.

TWO hours later a mild-eyed, soft-spoken rider cinched fast a saddle on the still untamed back and swung, cat-like, to it. Another hand snatched away a blindfold from wide and questioning eyes.

Roberts had spoken truth. He was a rider. All through the struggle of the maddened horse beneath him he sat his seat, though the blood burst from his nostrils and his head whirled on his shoulders. Five, ten, fifteen minutes the great horse fought as if knowing by instinct all the wiles of the trained bucker; sunfish, end for end, Roman chair, over and over, straight and fancy bucking in all its branches.

At the last the spectators breathed an "Ah," of relief, for the crazy, stiff-legged bounding ceased and the strides grew long and elastic as Childers shot for the barn side of the field. That mad burst of speed marked the end. The horse was conquered and needed but to be ridden to fatigue for a successful ending of the first lesson.

There are exceptions to all rules. Possibly, as the spectators held, Childers was maddened and knew not what he was doing. That is to be doubted. One prefers rather to believe that the great heart knew that his reason for being was accomplished and when he found that this roweling, lashing figure was not to be unseated he deliberately suicided rather than submit. At any rate his sudden, flashing burst of speed, breath-taking even to these men whose lives dealt with fast horses, ended with a crash against the side of the barn from which neither man nor horse ever arose.

All this is apropos of a newspaper clipping.

> Official confirmation has just been given to the report that the Wilkesville Farm has disposed of old Peter's Orloff and moved Lou's Son 2.02, the chestnut stallion out of Lou Manning 1.59 by the half-blood Morgan, Childers, to the head of the stud. It will be recalled that Lou's Son is the horse which last Fall went through the Government endurance contest with a perfect score and which this year evinced his versatility by competing in twelve races on the grand circuit without a defeat. There was a great future before this young horse on the track, as it is certain that his mark, 2.02, does not express his real possibilities, but the Wilkesville people feel that they would not be doing right by posterity in risking the loss of such a superb individual by train wreck or other accident.

That is all except that they say that Lou's Son is a bright chestnut with four white stockings and a blaze; that he has kindly eyes, wide set, and the greatest legs and loins on any living horse.

JUSTIFIABLE SUICIDE

by Earl H. Emmons

BECAUSE I'm kinda quiet-like and reticent and such,
You maybe think that life and things don't interest me much;
But that ain't it; although they's lots of things I'd like to know,
I learnt to curb them feelin's in the days of long ago.

'Twas out in Custer City, when the camp was young and raw
And full of folks who had the greatest disrespect for law,
The which was in the Winter in the year of Seventy-four,
That Winter we was snowed in tight for thirty weeks or more.

Well, me and seven *hombres* we was holed up in a shack,
The same includin' Pizen Bill, the Kid and Poker Jack
And Smilin' Sam and Texas Joe and Sheriff Placer Jim,
And then a tenderfoot we christens Tallahassee Slim.

And things was some monotonous, with not a thing to do;
We all was sick of cards and booze and of each other, too,
And so we holds a meetin' and we argues wide and free
Concernin' what to do to cure this thing they calls ongwee.

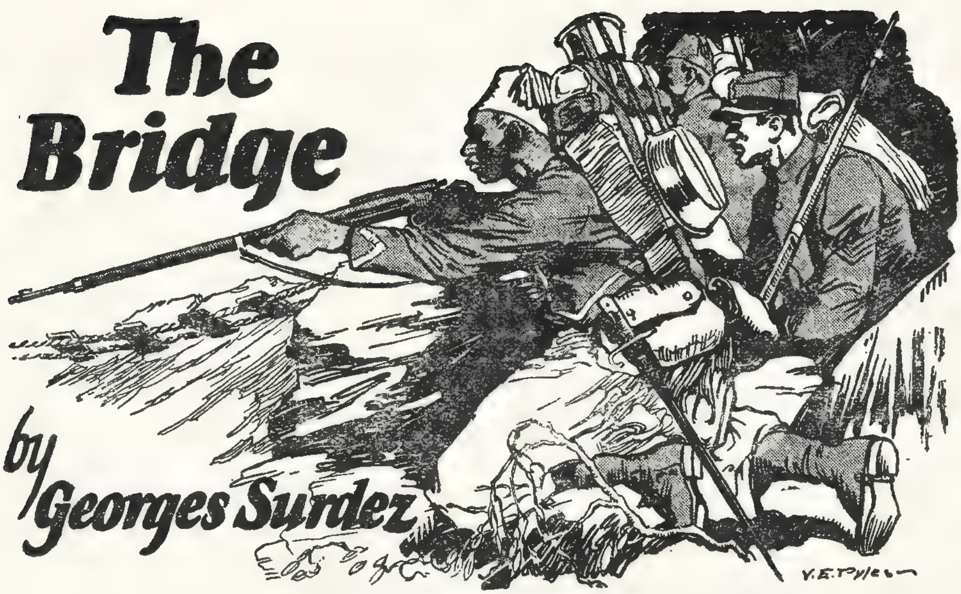
And everybody says his say, but no one can agree;
Then Tallahassee Slim he says he's got a great idee,
And Tallahassee rises up and thusly he orates;
"Le's all stand up and tell our names and why we left the States."

And then they's silence for the time it takes to bat an eye,
The kind of silence just before the lightnin' rips the sky;
Then seven guns roars out as one and Tallahassee died,
"And that's what's knowed," the sheriff says, "as lawful suicide."

And I been kinda quiet-like and reticent since then;
I never get inquisitive concernin' things or men,
And though they's lots and lots of things that I would like to know,
I learnt to curb them feelin's in the days of long ago.

The Bridge

by Georges Surdez



Author of "When the Sun Sat Down," "The White Man's Way," etc.

IN THE single room of his hut, suffocatingly hot, Sergeant Peller lay stretched on his narrow cot, gazing up at the mosquito-screen two feet from his face. The heat of the African sun baked through the dried grass roof and ceiling-cloth.

An attack of malaria is not necessarily dangerous. Peller was certain that he had taken quinine in time, and that his illness would wear off in the course of a few hours. But the drug made his ears ring with the sound of far off silver bells. This semiconsciousness was worse than delirium, for delirium at least blanks the mind. As it was, his temples throbbed painfully, and, when he passed his hand over his brow, he could feel the distended veins. His wrists gave him the impression of being imprisoned in lead bracelets; his skin was dry as parchment.

From the parade ground of the outpost came guttural sounds from the negroes, punctuated now and then by a sharp exclamation—sounds which beat like hammer blows on his brain. The smell from the cooking-shacks, usually lost in the riot of odors, now nauseated him.

The door opened suddenly, and a flood of red sunshine leaped across the beaten earth floor straight into his eyes. Peller rose with an effort.

"What do you want?"

Aboa, his orderly, saluted casually.

"Sergeant, lieutenant, he wants you."

Peller sighed and reached for his cloth tunic.

"All right, Aboa."

After the black left, he swore under his breath. Why should Malet disturb him, when he knew he was sick? There could be nothing of sufficient importance to warrant this. Rank was rank, but a trifling personal tact would have been more becoming in his superior. And yet this was Malet's way. Peller placed the pith helmet on his head, buttoned the tunic to the last button, and stepped into the yard.

Malet's hut was some twenty-five yards away. Peller, his body burning under the sun, wondered whether he would be able to negotiate the distance. But, as he proceeded, the exercise seemed to clear his head.

The lieutenant, in pajamas, was waiting for him in his small office. Malet, in official command at Fort Lenormand, was a dreamy, pleasure-loving young man, thoroughly bored with the life in the outpost. He spent his mornings in bed, his afternoons resting on the veranda and his nights in a vain attempt to keep cool. When his liver caused him inconvenience, he usually called Peller over and reproached him with his lack of efficiency.

On the white sergeant fell the bulk of the work, a hard proposition. Black soldiers are much like children. Unless occupied at serious tasks, they get into mischief. The *tirailleurs* did not steal too much from the neighboring villages, and were awaiting with patience the day of action.

Fort Lenormand stood close to the border of the Wadai, in the French Sudan. Thirty years before, on a bright, cheerful morning, a certain lieutenant of colonial infantry had been surrounded with his handful of men, and massacred. A grateful government honored his bones by naming after him three or four mud buildings, surrounded by a defensive wall eight feet high. Malet had smiled one day, and remarked that he might some time receive the same reward.

He glanced up casually as Peller entered.

"Lieutenant?" the sergeant questioned, saluting.

"Fever again? Decidedly, it's a habit with you." Then he went on abruptly, "where's Samake?"

"Is he gone?"

"Yes—again."

"I had him locked up."

"He broke through a window and went to the village. I have just seen a runner from Doukrou, the old chief, who says our man is running amuck, and won't we please come and get him."

"He'll be back for the five o'clock roll-call." Peller suggested. "He is noisy, but he won't hurt any one."

"Can't you keep him under control?" demanded Malet impatiently.

"I locked him up. As long as we don't put iron bars on the guard-house window, or place a special sentry over him, he'll get away. Short of shooting him, I don't see the remedy for his escapades."

"That's all I had to say, sergeant. You may go."

Malet picked up his three-months-old *Vie Parisienne.*

Again Peller found himself in the glaring sun, staggering with fever. His resentment against Malet grew. What nonsense, to disturb him for advice that could have been imparted at any time! And Samake! Something must be done to tame him.

There were in the fort twenty-five *tirailleurs*—husky blacks, recruited chiefly among Ouolofs and Bambaras. The black sheep of this aggregation was Private Tiebe Samake.

Samake was a Bambara of the Bambaras, which means a man among men. Tall, as all of his race, he crowded a hundred and eighty pounds of muscles on his frame and managed to look gaunt as a greyhound. As his name indicates to the initiated, Samake was, according to native tradition, a blood brother of the elephant, as the Koulibalis are blood brothers of the lion, the Keitas of the hippopotamus. The tradition should be believed, for Tiebe Samake's ways were those of the elephant. Long periods of absolute good nature, punctuated with fierce periods, when he ran amuck.

He was a Mahommedan. That is, several times a day, he spread his little rug, and prayed facing the east. He called this "making salaam." He never touched wine, which has been specifically forbidden to men of his faith, but, in some mysterious mental argument, he had come to the conclusion that prohibition did not extend to beer.

At Doukrou, the nearest village, there was plenty of beer to be found, some in bottles, some in little kegs. It is a notable fact that sundry beverages find their way into natives' hands with far greater speed than missionary tracts. Periodically, a *tam-tam* was held in Doukrou. A *tam-tam* is a native ball, and just as much an occasion of state as are social affairs in temperate climes. Samake was fond of dancing. African dancing, as a rule, is strenuous. One gets very hot, very thirsty. Doukrou, the village chief, was a jovial fellow, and liked Samake. Whether the chief had been named after the village or the village after the chief is not clear. Doukrou and his numerous sons—the elderly leader had a hundred wives—would imbibe together with Samake. After absorbing a certain quantity of the amber fluid, Samake began to be conscious of his racial superiority.

He would return to the fort, encompassing more territory than the narrow trails would comfortably allow, tearing his government clothes in the thorny underbrush. Quelling the sentry with a glance, he would often challenge his fellow troopers to single combat. It was then that Sergeant Peller usually entered the scene. One word would suffice. Recognizing the pigmentation of his superior's skin, Samake would salute with exaggerated respect, and proceed to the guard-house, braced on a comrade's shoulder.

A threat was always sufficient to obtain this instant obedience. Peller had told him that unless he behaved, he would be left behind when the detachment took the field. The Bambara was far from a model soldier in barracks, but when fighting was in the air, when runners from the north reported prowling Messalits, Samake was changed.

The village did not see him. He spent his days sharpening and caressing his bayonet. The well-oiled rifle and long-nosed cartridges were not to be despised, but Samake placed his greatest trust on the twenty-two-inch blade, slim, four-edged. The Bambaras' knowledge of firearms is relatively recent, and long before the bushy fields of the Sudan echoed to the rattle of musketry, their ancestors won kingdoms in Central Africa with well-ground swords.

Samake in action was a sight to behold; a certain heated calm, outwardly quiet motions, with savage lust smoldering beneath. His thick lips shut, or parted on his strong teeth in a grin, wide nostrils quivering, coal-black eyes burning like lanterns in a tunnel, he was the personification of strife. He kept his eyes on the enemy, his ears open to commands, maneuvered, stabbed with automatic gestures—gestures which never faltered, never missed.

His fighting made up for his faults. His straying from grace had been regarded by Peller with tolerance, and even a hint of amusement.

But today, matters had gone too far.

THE sergeant was aware of a commotion by the gate. He recognized the Bambara's tones, shouting threats to the negro corporal, Bo Diare, a muscular Ouolof, a soldier of great intelligence and proved valor.

Between the native non-com. and the gesticulating Samake, the sentry stood, warding off the drunken man's long, clawing hands with a nimbly-handled gun-butt. Other troopers, awakened from siesta, gathered about, laughing and shouting. To Peller's aching head, this uproar was torture. He gathered his strength, and marched firmly toward the Bambara, who instantly desisted in the attack.

"*Bonjour*, sergeant—" the black offered. "I go to lock up right away."

Peller's temper was aroused. He brushed the sentry aside and faced the private, looked him up and down from head to foot. He did not smile, he did not cajole. His words bit, lashed the Bambara to the quick.

"Thou! Dirty and torn, drunk. A fine soldier, not! *Sauvage! Negre!*"

Savage: a first insult. The *tirailleurs* apply the word to the enemies they fight for France. But the word "negro" was the climax. It is useless to attempt to instil in the brain of a Sudanese or west coast native that the term has nothing offensive, that it is as polite as the word "European" applied to white men. The *tirailleurs* refer to themselves as *noirs*—blacks—and a negro to them is a low, unworthy person. A black from Senegal, stoker on a mail steamer, was heard to conclude a wordy battle with an Indo-Chinese kitchen boy, yellow ivory in color, with the crushing retort—

FRENCH WEST AFRICA
LIBERIA
IVORY COAST
GOLD COAST
NIGERIA
ANGLO-EGYPTIAN SUDAN
EQUATORIAL AFRICA
KAMERUN
GULF OF
GUINEA
FRENCH CONGO
BELGIAN CONGO
BRIT EA
TANG TERR
ATLANTIC OCEAN
PORTUGESE WEST AFRICA
RHODESIA
SOUTHWEST AFRICA
BECHUANA LAND
PORTUGUESE
UNION OF SOUTH AFRICA
CAPE TOWN
AFRICA
SCALE

"After all, thou art nothing but a negro!"

A blow in the face, an insult to his female ancestors would have left the *tirailleur* unmoved. But to be called a negro and a savage in the same breath was too much. Sobered instantly, he drew himself up, saluted, and marched to the tiny shack of the guard-house, alone. He did not stagger. His soul had been hurt. His former respect and love for the sergeant had disappeared. Peller would ever be the man who called "negro" and "savage" before all his comrades. In primitive brains, hate finds a fertile soil.

Peller went back to his cot, and waited for the breaking out of sweat which would mark the end of the attack. The perspiration came a little after sundown, and the white man got up, feeling as well as ever. He was still a young man, thirty-five at the most. Of average height, his face appeared molded in bronze, baked to an old metal tint by the tropical sun. He possessed the peculiar courage and resilience which comes to men through force of habit. One becomes calloused to dangers as to everything else. And, in fifteen years in the colonial army, straying from the Saharan border to the edge of the Wadai, Sergeant Peller had faced death in many ways. His fever over, he put the remembrance of the pain out of his mind. Unluckily, he also forgot what he had said to Samake.

He was surprized, when he next made his rounds in the privates' quarters, to see Samake get up at his approach and disappear within the hut, with his two wives and his children. On duty, the Bambara was perfect in behavior, but once stripped of his uniform, and back in his native *boubou* of Sudanese cloth, efforts at conversation made by Peller were futile.

Consideration of a black private's feelings by a white superior is not strange in a country where the strength of the detachment depends upon its morale. Discipline among the crude natives of the French native infantry is not identical with that in European troops. A good officer of *tirailleurs* takes a personal interest in all his men, talks with them frequently, knows their troubles, settles their domestic problems.

Peller wondered mildly, then decided that Samake was ashamed of his drunkness. He was confirmed in this belief when the native allowed several *tam-tams* to go by without honoring the village with his presence. And Peller's memory was clouded by his fever.

Life went on in the same routine.

FOR some years, ever since the pacification of the Lake Chad region, the French had been contemplating the conquest of the Wadai, the last territory remaining of the huge tract of African territory allotted to France in various conferences. Fort Lenormand, though smaller than other posts, was close to the border, and for that reason indicated as a point of departure for the invasion.

And to Fort Lenormand, came a strong column: one company of naval infantry, *marsouins*, the leathernecks of France; two companies of Senegalese *tirailleurs;* two small field-guns, several machine-gun sections, four hundred bearers and a troop of cavalry. In all, some eight hundred rifles and fifty sabers. In command was Major Plisson, a bearded, lanky officer, with three rows of ribbons on his chest, an ex-Foreign Legionnaire.

The fort, usually occupied by the twenty-five *tirailleurs* comprising its garrison and their families, suddenly swarmed with over twelve hundred men, all of whom must be assigned to quarters. Peller was overwhelmed with work and Samake was forgotten.

Malet, under the superior officer's eyes, developed a certain amount of energy. With his military school learning he impressed the major, who had risen from the ranks, with his ability as a tactician. Plisson, charmed with Malet's clear exposé of the situation, decided to take him and his men along, leaving a section of Senegalese troopers to hold the outpost. The news of this arrangement sent the local *tirailleurs* into great joy and feverish preparations for departure.

Packs were buckled on, one fine morning, and the column, mighty as African columns go, moved off toward the northeast, with Malet, Peller, Samake and the rest swinging along cheerfully. Ahead were the Messalits, fighting, glory.

The Wadai offers variety in aspect. There are savanas, long ranges of hills, thick forests. The most important foe to be engaged were the Messalits, under the command of an able leader, a half-breed Arab. Soon after entering their territory, the first skirmish took place, short, sharp encounters, ending invariably in the defeat of the defenders. In the open plain, the overwhelming superiority in numbers counted little in the natives' favor. Cleverly handled, with maneuvers born of long experience against primitive races, the French forces swept everything before them. The cavalry of the Messalit sultan, hundreds strong, was repeatedly smashed to fragments, and sabered by the well-organized spahis.

The nature of the soil changed as the column progressed farther northward. Forests became more frequent, the plains smaller, and the ability of the French force to execute tactical movements was impaired. Progressing along trails sufficient only for two men to march abreast, where the long range of modern rifles counted for little owing to the limited horizon, the invaders suffered losses—losses that shook them far more than the same number in open battle. Stragglers were cut down, advance guards surprized and fired upon at rifle-length before defense could be organized. Night attacks were constantly occurring.

In the Beida Hills, for the first time, the Messalits made a determined stand.

Peller, who was with the advance guard, marched into a small valley, sparsely-timbered, with grass four feet high waving in the breeze. At the far end of the valley, emerging from the vegetation, shone the spearheads of a horde of men, and the sun caught on hundreds of rifle-barrels.

The advance guard halted, and awaited the rest of the outfit before spreading out on either side and forming a skirmish line. Plisson, glasses in hand, trotted his mount back and forth behind the lines, jubilating. Peller also was glad. A chance to come to grips with the elusive blacks would be welcome after the fighting of the past weeks. An enemy that may be seen is far less formidable than a mysterious attacker, materializing to strike then disappearing into the forest.

Plisson halted by Malet's side, indicated the native force with a gesture.

"Pretty bad for a frontal attack," he said. "That bush is probably studded with pointed sticks."

It was a custom of the natives to plant in the way of an advancing foe small stakes, sharpened at the ends and sometimes poisoned, advanced at the charging men at an angle of forty-five degrees. In the tall grass and in the excitement of the fighting, they were hard to avoid, and the men were injured upon them. It was indeed probable that the Messalits had so arranged the field.

Malet nodded.

"We should flank them," suggested Plisson. "Don't you think so, lieutenant?"

"Obviously."

"If we succeed in throwing a detachment in their rear we'll shatter them and end matters once and for all."

Plisson puckered his lips, and indicated the left of the valley.

"You'll take your men and edge around that way, skirting the foot of the hills. You can gain the other side of the valley without being seen. It should be easy enough to find a trail over the far hills and turn the position. When you're ready, have your bugle sounded."

Malet, a trifle pale, started to protest.

"With twenty-five men——"

"In a surprize, as good as a hundred," Plisson replied.

Sergeant Peller gathered the men and led them forward. Malet dismounted, left his horse in charge of a spahi, and followed. Diving into the bush, sometimes cutting a way through with the *coupe-coupe*, the heavy-bladed machette, the turning-party painfully progressed to the end of the open ground, turned toward the enemy, and gained the foot of the farther hills. Peller waited for Malet to come up.

"There's a trail ascending, over there."

Malet seemed to pull himself together with an effort.

"I'll lead," he said.

It was evident that Malet was in a peculiar state of nervousness. To be able to carry on, to keep his grip, he must bluff before his companion, which is often the case with a frightened man. Peller was vaguely ashamed for his officer, and at the same time admired his effort.

They entered the trail Indian-file and were soon lost in a sea of undergrowth. Peller brought up the rear with Bo Diare immediately ahead of him, preceded by another *tirailleur*, named Yatera, and then Samake, whose broad back, loaded down with a knapsack, nevertheless showed bulging muscles as he ascended the slope.

Suddenly spearmen appeared in an attempt to cut down the white man at the rear, left almost alone. Peller, realizing they had no firearms and not wishing to give the alarm, did not use his revolver but leaped back to avoid the onrush, freeing, as he did, the rifle-strap from his shoulder. Bo Diare and Yatera, comprehending the need for silence, also used the bayonet. In a brief panting struggle three spearmen were disposed of. There was no further attack.

Peller was cool enough to notice that Samake had not moved to help, but merely waited, ready to defend himself if necessary. Bo Diare addressed him in Bambara. The black grinned at the corporal's anger. Bo Diare looked at Peller and shook his head meaningly. For a trooper to witness an attack on a white superior and stand stolidly by, toying with his rifle, was unprecedented. Peller recalled being very lenient to Samake on many occasions. His indignation was high, but he said nothing.

"Wait, you swine, I'll find out about this!" he thought.

He realized, from the expression on the negro's face that Samake hated him. He remembered how the big black had avoided him at the fort. He was puzzled but there was more pressing business to be done.

He signed for the others to go ahead and once again followed warily.

He was certain now that the spearmen had acted independently, and that the shouts had not been noticed by the main force of the Messalits, who, from the volume of firing on the right, were having their hands full holding back the Senegalese companies. He joined Malet in a tiny clearing. Before them was a wide ravine, with the dried bed of a stream showing many feet below. A rope bridge, suspended from near-by trees, spanned the gully. The lieutenant, his face still white, his collar open and the perspiration running down his neck, approached and spoke.

"We've got a prisoner," he said. "Found him here, when we came. According to the interpreter, he says the way is clear ahead."

"Then you can be sure it isn't! They don't give information for charity."

"Oh, he wouldn't talk at first," Malet replied. "But I prodded him with a bayonet. He says he was supposed to cut the bridge if he saw any one coming, but was surprized."

"He lies," said Peller. "Any native could have heard us coming up that trail."

"What would you do?"

"Send four or five men ahead as scouts."

"Takes too long. I want to get this over with. I believe he tells the truth. But first, let's see about the bridge."

Bo Diare volunteered to test the crossing. He gave his knapsack to one of his men and, rifle in hand, proceeded, at every step examining the ropes for possible cuts. The others looked on breathlessly. If anything was wrong, Diare would fall. Or he might be shot when he stepped to the far side. But Diare reached the far ridge, examined the fastenings, then waved his rifle over his head.

"You see!" said Malet.

"But we'd better keep together," Peller suggested.

"That means we'll proceed at a snail's pace. I know the way's clear."

Tightening his chin-strap and belt-buckle, he started.

"At the double, now!"

Impetuously, he hurried across the bridge and up the trail, in the lead. Peller placed a guard over the prisoner, then again closed the march. He had not gone twenty yards before the sound of shots from ahead came to him muffled through the forest. He cursed fluently.

He knew what had happened.

Strung out in a running line, the *tirailleurs* had arrived one by one on the crest of the hill, winded and tired. There could be no immediate coordination. The enemy, securely ambushed, had the advantage.

Yatera came running back, bewildered, his face bloody.

"Sergeant, come quick. Yeutenant hurt!"

Peller brushed him aside and ran on.

The situation was worse than he had imagined. The crest was almost bald of trees, and in the clearing stood a small native village, surrounded with a *sanie,* a barrier of tree-trunks. Malet, emerging from the trail, had been an easy target for the ready-aimed rifles concentrated on the opening.

Peller threw himself to the ground, traveling on hands and knees to avoid the shots fired by the villagers. He found the lieutenant lying in the shelter of a clump of bushes, his hands covered with blood. Bo Diare, his eyes wide with concern, squatted near him.

"Hit?" Peller asked stupidly.

"Belly," Malet stated. "Go and make that turn—you can cut through the bush."

"I can't leave you. I'll get you back to the column."

"I'm done, anyway," said Malet.

Malet was evidently the type to be afraid of things in prospective. He had too much imagination. Now that he was actually hurt his fear had left him.

"I order—" he began.

"A chance for your life is worth more than a few natives. Plisson would back me in what I'm doing."

BO DIARE had already made a rough litter with branches. With Malet borne by two *tirailleurs* the return trip was begun.

The sergeant entertained the hope that the Messalits, satisfied with their first success, would not pursue. He was worried as to the initiative he had taken. If he saved Malet he could not carry out the turning move. He could not kill the lieutenant, nor expose him to torture from the natives. To abandon him with a small guard would weaken his own force to uselessness, and expose the men left behind to massacre. Yes, Malet must be taken to the column.

His hope of a safe retreat was shattered. The Messalits had issued from the stockade and pursued. They had cut in, by trails unknown to the invaders, and were shooting across the ravine at the man left as guard over the prisoner. On Peller's arrival, they dispersed immediately, and took cover, but kept up a steady sniping.

The only way to get Malet across was to push the natives back from the vicinity of the bridge. Otherwise the bearers of the litter might be shot down and Malet would fall into the gully.

"Diare!"

The black answered immediately.

"Keep six men on this side. Send the others over one by one."

Diare assigned six men to remain behind, among them Samake. Peller ordered them into the bushes to clear the neighborhood by the bridge.

"Take the lieutenant across now," he shouted.

Malet was carried across.

"One by one, the others!" Peller ordered again.

Diare crossed, then four of the men who had remained behind. Peller intended to be the last and cut the bridge ropes. Samake, the last man left on the dangerous side, was now running for the bridge. From the bushes across the gully the rifles of the *tirailleurs* who had crossed, covered the retreat.

The sergeant rose from the bushes in which he had been concealed, and in his turn, sprinted for the bridge. But he was not as fortunate as his men. A bullet in the thigh swept his legs from beneath him. He dropped, sprawled out. His rifle flew one way, his revolver another. Half-stunned he got to his knees. The bridge must be cut——

His eyes cleared. Samake had halted, was staring at him.

"I'm hit! Run across and cut the bridge!"

Samake, with the bullets flying about him, did not obey.

Peller groped for his revolver, laid his hand upon it.

"Go, or——"

But the Bambara had moved. Swiftly he severed the ropes with his bayonet, and the bridge slid limply into the gap, disappeared. And Samake was on the dangerous side with his sergeant.

Peller saw him approaching, smiled. He hesitated, then threw his revolver down. Peller reasoned that a bayonet-thrust, even from one of his own men, would be preferable to torture. Samake had seen his chance to cut himself off from the French and curry favor with the natives. Samake stood over him, bent, slid an arm around his chest. Peller noticed a curious detail: when the *tirailleur* had cut the bridge, the Messalits had ceased firing, doubtless surprized at this curious act. Peller was surprized when Samake straightened up, lifted him off the ground and coolly carried him to the shelter of the nearest tree.

Recovering from their surprize the Messalits rushed forward, confident that this one wounded man and a single trooper would prove easy game. But they were deceived. Samake aimed and fired, dropping four men with as many shots, and unbelievably daring, disdainful of his foes, counter-attacked. He, a single man against twenty, counter-attacked. He met the onrush with a rush of his own, bayonet low, full speed, and was upon the nearest warrior. A deft twist of the long blade sent the lance flying, a lunge, and the bayonet sank into the native's mid-section. A quick recover, another lunge and another went down. Astonished at this brand of fighting, the others drew back swiftly, and Samake regained the tree.

Peller was only partly conscious during what followed. He heard firing close by, was vaguely aware the sun was sinking. Then he heard a voice that was not Samake's.

"We're here, sergeant," Bo Diare said.

He explained that Malet had forbidden them to abandon him, that one of the *tirailleurs* had managed the descent to the stream-bed and the climb up the farther side, carrying a rope. Leaving the lieutenant with four men, the others had swung along the rope with their hands. Peller looked about into the black faces around him.

Peller took stock of the situation. He had lost a great deal of blood. But with assistance and a bandage supplied by the corporal, he felt able to negotiate the passage. He said this to Bo Diare.

Bo Diare smiled, and replied—

"I think the savages have gone——"

* * *

THAT night the detachment marched into camp. Malet had died during the trip. Peller gave only the bare details of the encounter. Plisson, who perhaps understood more than was said, accepted the narration. Malet was buried after a speech made by the doctor, extolling the qualities of the dead officer. Then a volley was fired over the grave, and the name of a possible outpost in the region was indicated.

Peller lay on a stretcher, smoking, satisfied that the affair was over. There would be others, but they would be met in their turn. Until the last— But why worry.

Samake puzzled him.

He sent for the Bambara through Diare.

The black was as ever, without emotion, and reserved.

Peller propped himself on an elbow.

"Listen, Samake, straight speech with you."

"I hear——"

"Dost thou hate me?"

"Yes——"

"And yet, yesterday thou didst save me when but a short time before on the march thou didst make no move."

"Others were there to help then."

Peller smiled.

"Why art angry with me?"

"Thou hast called me 'negro,' 'savage.' "

"I did? When——"

"When I came drunk from the *tam-tam*."

"I do not remember. But I was ill and did not mean the words."

"They were spoken."

"To have left me to die would have removed the offense," Peller went on, for he had his argument well planned.

"Yes——"

Peller turned to Bo Diare.

"Tell the men that I say I have offended Samake with words that may apply to a bushman but never to a *tirailleur*—even when drunk. He had my life in his hands and chose to save me. All is well."

"Yo," agreed Diare. "All is well."

The corporal left. Samake was about to follow. Peller called him back.

"But thou hast not yet said why thou didst save me."

Samake hunted for the words before he could explain:

"I be soldier. Thou art soldier. Yeutenant he be hit. No leave him. I no leave——"

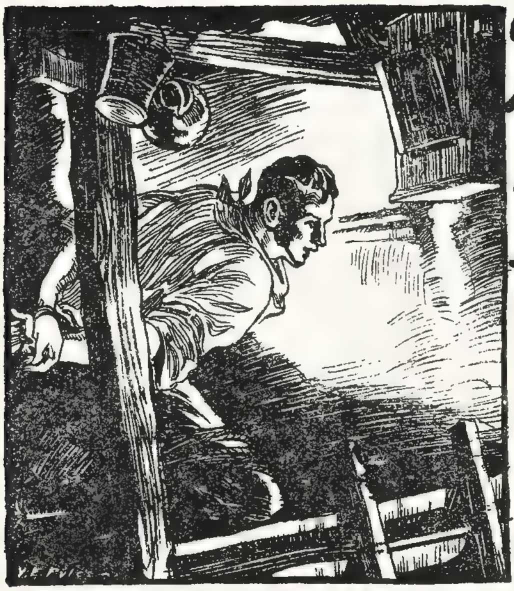
Peller cleared his throat.

"I have asked a medal for thee which will be granted," he said.

Samake grinned and went his way. He was going to look for beer. And being an able man, he would find it.

Peller followed him with thoughtful eyes. This simple black, without long training in the fine points of ethics, was, as he had said, a soldier, with the faults and qualities of the true warrior. Fighting blood does not lie. It speaks one language among men, bridges the gap between all races.

Arthur Schmidt



Necklaces and Dan Wheeler

CONCLUSION

by John I. Cochrane

Author of "Sled Wheeler and the Nameless Order," "Sled Wheeler and the Diamond Ranch," etc.

The first part of the story briefly retold in story form.

ON A New York street Dan Wheeler saw Stuart McLeod in action in a fist-fight, and immediately chose him to be his partner. Mac, being jobless and broke, gratefully accepted.

An evening at the theater, dodging a detective, brought Mac and Dan face to face with Mary Mason and Piet Van Twiller. Mary Mason was McLeod's uncle's charge, and to Mac she was The Girl. Mac did not speak. Later, on that night of adventure, a couple of bruisers unsuccessfully tried to slug Mac. They caught one.

"Who's paying you for this?" demanded Dan fiercely.

"Matty de Mick," whimpered the fellow.

Matty's joint on the Bowery was therefore the destination for Dan.

"GOOD evening, Matty."

Wheeler stepped forward holding out his hand, a slim, effeminate hand, but one that held merciless strength.

"Keep off!" rasped the tough. "You beat me up when I was a kid, but you don't work that again."

In the moment of the hand-clasp Wheeler had twisted the gangster around and pinned his arm against his back.

"Now, Matty, who paid you for this?" he asked.

They got the information that a masked man living under the Russian consulate had been the instigator of the attack on Mac. Dan's warning to Matty to leave the boy alone in the future was physical and painful. The pair left the Bowery joint, with Matty unconscious on the table. Dan had broken Matty's arm with his own two hands.

On their way up-town Wheeler and McLeod came across Piet Van Twiller and Reginald Willing, a former friend of Mac's—Piet happily and helplessly drunk. With a promise to call on him some day at the Grand Union Hotel, Mac helped Reggie into a carriage with Piet. The two drove off. Dan, ready for anything, gave orders to his cabman to take Mac and him to an address in Pell Street. They stopped before a shop bearing the sign—

Huen Ling, Importer.

THEY were ushered into the presence of a tall, magnificent, dignified Oriental.

He spoke with the purest English:

"You came just in time, Mr. Wheeler. I have been out on business that concerns both of you—if this is Mr. Stuart McLeod. Yes, I see the family resemblance."

After a recital of their experiences, Huen Ling told them of the operations of the "Spark Gang," and added that in detecting the gang there were two serious complications—one, that the contents of certain papers inimical to the diplomatic circles in Washington must not be made known.

"And the other?" asked Dan.

"The other is perhaps not so much a complication as an incentive. Did you know that Alan McLeod—" Mac's wealthy uncle—"was a close friend, years ago, of your friend and instructor, Slater?"

To Dan's affirmative, he went on—

"Then I do not need to press my argument?"

Dan's hoarse whisper roused McLeod, who was falling to sleep from exhaustion.

"I'll get him if we both live. But what's *your* reason?"

Mac could not hear the reply. But he heard the Chinaman add—

"It is now your duty."

THE next Mac knew was that it was daylight. He was back in his hotel. He had slept through a day and a night. Dan hastily showed him the newspapers.

"Here," he said, "is a blamed good story today.

"Necklaces and Dan Wheeler," copyright, 1924, by John I. Cochrane.

The 'Mysterious Israfil' was robbed of his diamonds last night. Explosion and fire; diamonds walked off in the confusion. Regular Spark Gang job. Israfil is a hypnotist, and lectures to some of the smart set just now on it as well as on ju-jutsu, and he does the stunts himself. I think he is a bluff, and I know the Jap wrestling, so we ought to be able to call him. But let that go. Piet called this morning and said that you were to see your uncle immediately after breakfast."

TWO hours later Mac faced his uncle, whom he had not seen for years. He knew very little about Alan McLeod, except rumors. Somewhere he had picked up intimations to the general effect that his relative, now in his old age and very ill, was regarded as an eccentric possessing great wealth, which included a magnificent diamond necklace. But Mac knew nothing definite.

"First," said the old man, "I want you to know that I am going to leave you and Mary Mason my money equally divided. Second: Is there any reason why you can't come here to stay for the few days or weeks I have yet to live?"

To Mac it was a poser. He had promised to help Dan. He couldn't turn down now the man who had taken him out of the streets, cold, hungry and out of work, and launched him again into a world that was warm and good.

He shook his head.

"No, I have to stick to Dan Wheeler."

"Then if you must you must. But I don't care to have Wheeler meet Mary, and I want to warn you not to fall in love with her, for she ought to make a brilliant marriage. I think I have found a man for her. Within a few days I expect a young English nobleman——"

The strain of the interview was telling on the old man. Mac couldn't stay after Mary Mason was announced. From his bed the older McLeod whispered:

"Stop at the bank for your check-book on your way back. *Don't* break with Wheeler. I may have to leave you to protect Mary. Wheeler is dangerous to both men and women, but *don't offend him.* If you ever need advice go to Huen Ling!"

He closed his eyes and looked like a corpse as Mac hurried out to send in the waiting nurse.

BACK at the hotel Mac told Dan of his visit to Alan McLeod. From Tommy, the bell-hop at the Grand Union Hotel—a lad whom Dan had befriended—Dan learned that there was another plot to make way with Mac.

"It shows us one thing, Mac; your uncle's diamond necklace must be a winner. Other things we must find out for ourselves. Shall we walk into the trap?" asked Dan abruptly.

"Yes—of course," answered Mac without hesitation.

A few minutes later they entered "The Chapel," a crowded *rathskeller*.

"This way, McLeod! Come on, Wheeler! Two chairs waiting for you," they were greeted.

They found the table from which came the calls, and there met Nan Preston, Bridget McDevitt and Jane Anderson. Steve Collins was acting as host.

Steve and Dan were not friends. Steve was a boxer of some standing and was being used—so Dan thought—to take the Spark Gang's spite out on him and Mac. Almost immediately there was a bantering over which would be the winner in a bout—Collins or Dan. But Mac heard little of it for he was engrossed in conversation with Bridget McDevitt. A short time later, when Bridget mentioned going home, Mac offered to escort her.

Once started for her house, Bridget told Mac that she was working on the Spark Gang job for the Green Detective Agency, and that they and the Central office had separated Mac and Dan in order to talk alone with Dan.

And it was Bridget who pointed out to Mac his special interest to the Spark Gang.

"I don't see the connection," said Mac. "What are they looking for?"

"I don't know exactly, but you are in danger. Didn't your uncle tell you about——"

"About a necklace? No, he did not."

"There they go now." Bridget clutched his arm. "That was your friend Dan, seeing Nan home. This is the street he'd take after leaving her, but nobody's looking for him. Something's gone wrong—let's hurry!"

When they arrived at her home Bridget stepped inside the hall and flashed on a light. Instantly it was turned off again, and Mac found himself struggling in the dark. A blow from behind stunned him.

He awoke to find that all plans had gone wrong. There was Dan, who had arrived in time to save Mac from being killed, talking to the Chief—Brine himself. During the conversation it developed that Brine knew nothing that Dan did not know. Dan was caustic to the Chief's good night.

When they arrived at the hotel Dan was suffering with acute neuralgia, and they went to Carlson's to engage the services of a masseur. The next morning Mac left Dan at the hotel and went to see his uncle.

IN THE afternoon he reported to Dan.

"The first thing he wanted to know," excitedly began Mac, "was whether I'd been attacked, and then he told me about the necklace. He told me it had been collected stone by stone; all his money is in it; and an attempt has been made to steal it in London, another in Paris and still another in Hamburg. He thinks the Main Guy of the Spark Gang is the same crook who was trying to get it then."

Dan laid his hand on Mac's knee and spoke in a low voice.

"What is the name?"

When Mac managed to think of the name, Jean Bouvais, Dan went white with anger.

"That settles it! Mac, we're going to get this Main Guy. Come on! To Israfil's!"

Within half an hour Israfil was peering into a crystal and advising them that the Main Guy would probably know that Mac did not know the whereabouts of his uncle's necklace. The real reason for their visit was Dan's warning:

"Tonight I may stage a little show to prove that the Main Guy had better lay off Mac. I want to leave no doubt that it is unsafe to play horse with me."

After they left, Mac insisted that Israfil was the Main Guy, but Dan pointed out that Israfil always had a waterproof alibi whenever any "job" was pulled off.

Mac and Dan parted, promising to meet that night at Hawley's, a gambling-club. Mac met

Piet Van Twiller and Reggie Willing also on their way to Hawley's.

Over the roulette wheel Steve Collins challenged Dan to a four-round bout that night, and they settled on Carlson's gymnasium as the place. The arrangements made, Dan drew Mac aside.

"I want you to get Israfil to be my second."

"But," said Mac, "what if he refuses?"

"Tell him—and for your life don't repeat this or let any one hear you tell him—that '*No man can make him.*' "

Armed with this cryptic remark, Mac left with Reggie, Piet and Hawley to find Israfil. They found him in his séance rooms, and after Mac gave the message Israfil agreed to be Dan's second.

The four men left, and, impelled by curiosity, turned back into the room to find that Israfil had disappeared. They discovered that he had descended into the lower part of the house by a hidden lift in a closet. While they pondered over this bit of hokum, they reached Carlson's, two doors away.

Reggie suddenly came out of his ponderings.

"Hurry up! I almost forgot; I'm to be Wheeler's other second."

He led the charge up the stairs without another thought of Israfil's stage disappearance.

THE fight served its purpose for Dan. He whipped Collins and demonstrated his staying powers to Israfil.

The next day Mac's uncle told him more of the necklace—how he had slaved to get it together and how he had fought to keep it.

"When I die, it is yours and Mary's. I shall tell you half the key to finding it and Mary the other half."

The old man drew the boy to him and whispered—

"Drag the bottom of Sucksand Pond."

Later in the day Mac explained to Dan that the safe in his uncle's house was called the Sucksand Pond, as was a quicksand pond on the family's farm near Stanley, Vermont.

Scarcely had this explanation been given when there came a fire-alarm and Dan sent Mac to his uncle's house.

"Time is scarce now, and this might be another Spark Gang job at his place."

Mac arrived to see the fulfilment of Dan's prophecy.

The house had been wrecked. The safe had been rifled. In the one remaining room Alan McLeod died, warning Mac to stick to Dan and Huen Ling.

A few days later Dan and Mac accepted positions at Carlson's sanitarium as instructors in physical culture. Carlson had, a few days before, written a confession to being the Main Guy of the Spark Gang and had committed suicide. Now Israfil, the real owner of the sanitarium, was hiring Mac and Dan.

Dan was not satisfied, however, that Carlson's confession had been one of his true status.

"Come on, Mac; let's get our luggage up to Carlson's," said Dan in the hotel. "There's going to be fun in this yet. And by the way, I see that Miss Mason has gone up to your family place in the country. Well," he sighed, "the Prince Heinrich will not see her this trip!"

He laughed heartily over the ardent foreign suitor's discomfort, and chuckled all the way to Carlson's, where they were to live.

At the door they were met by Tommy, the former Grand Union bell-hop.

Placing him at the door as a lookout, Dan and Mac started an inspection of the house.

They found a labyrinth of seemingly old sewers under the house that connected with other houses in the neighborhood. Suddenly Mac stopped.

"I thought I heard voices."

As they mounted a ladder to investigate, some one called: "*Hola!* M. Bouvais!"

In a moment more, Wheeler, bristling with hatred, was in the thick of the fight. The French-Canadians whom they had attacked had been surprized, but, being hopelessly outnumbered, Dan had to get himself and Mac out of a window and back to Carlson's.

Mac went to his room and Dan stayed below to talk to Israfil. Curiosity as to their conversation finally made Mac go below to eavesdrop. What he he heard turned him cold. Dan was agreeing to go to Vermont, bring back Mary Mason and the necklace, turn the latter over to Israfil and allow Mary to be abducted by Prince Heinrich.

Mac rushed out to catch a train for Stanley, Vermont, and ran into Bridget McDevitt, to whom he told everything he knew.

When Mac arrived at Stanley the next day, he found that Dan had arrived before him. Maddened at Wheeler for double-crossing him, Mac started a fight which ended with him being decidedly sore of body and spirit. Dan had not hurt him, but had put him out with Jap wrestling-tricks.

Snubbed by Mary, Mac went home with his Uncle Jed, planning how best to outwit Dan.

XII

IN THE sweet, drowsy twilight of a May evening, in a silence broken only by the homing twitter of nesting birds or the steady, sleepy whir of a late-singing frog, Mac tried to make his story sound probable to Uncle Jed.

They had stopped to sit down on the stone wall where the lane ended in the "night-pasture," and their immediate surroundings made Mac's task all the harder. For there is no place on this good green earth more restful and healing for a troubled heart than the sleeping-place of cows at night.

The contented, drowsing cattle lie all about in the sweet half-darkness, turn their large, placid eyes on the intruder with a gentle trust and kindness—sleepily curious but benignly untroubled—while they swing their sleek jaws slowly in champing slumbrous unison. The dew clings and glistens on their cool soft noses, they draw into their lungs great easy breaths of the pure night air, breathe it out again moist and warm, laden with the sweetness of new milk and grasses to spread abroad its fragrance all about them and to bless their chosen resting-place like an evensong benediction.

It was in this place of almost holy peace and tranquillity that Mac had to pour out his story of theft and murder, of arson and kidnaping; and he hardly expected it to be believed, even though a part of it was already known to Uncle Jed. He had forgotten that the old gentleman had had his day among wild and lawless men in a country and time when law was not.

He was therefore surprized when, after hearing him to the end without comment, Uncle Jed announced:

"By mighty! Ye got to git a move on! Alan was just odd enough to do 'most anything, and if that necklace is what he sunk in the pond the sooner ye get it to New York and get the money for it the better all round. But you ought to have a guard—some one to go with ye that ain't afraid of anything on—'Y jingo! I got it! The very man for ye!"

And he interrupted his own monolog, slapping his leg in triumph.

"Who is it?"

"Hen Watson, county sheriff; lives over't the junction. You know Hen."

Uncle Jed was excitedly stepping around as he talked.

"He's the best thief-catcher in the country. They send for him all over—out o' the State even—and he knows New York 's well 's he knows Middle Town o' Stanley. He's on the governor's staff and knows every big crook in the United States.

"I bet ye Hen would go with ye jest for the fun on't. He's read all about these Spark Gang robberies, and——"

Mac had to stop the flow of eulogy.

"But how can we get hold of him this evening?" he asked. "This ought to be done right now—tonight."

"'Course it had; think I'm a fool? Hen will be drivin' past here any minute now—met him this mornin' on his way t' the junction, takin' his wife to the train. She's goin' to Middleville to visit her folks, and Hen said he'd be back along 'bout dark. C'm on up t' the barway—we can watch the pond and the ro'd both ways from there.

"Gosh! But you are playin' in luck this time, boy, I tell ye! Scrape the country with a fine-tooth comb and ye couldn't rake up a better man f'r the job than Hen Watson. And he'll do it too—sure as guns!"

Thus Uncle Jed. Talking thirteen to the dozen while he led Mac up across the night-pasture to the barway on the main road, Uncle Jed at the same time kept a keen ear cocked for the sound of an approaching team. While they waited at the bars Uncle Jed never once gave McLeod a chance to get in a word, but there was not long to wait.

"There he comes. I'd know their steps any time, Hen's span o' bay colts!"

Tense with excitement, the old gentleman stepped out into the road as a team came spanking down the grade from the wooded hill. But he never ceased his talk:

"Always drives a fast team, Hen dooes—one reason he always gets his man. Y'know he ain't never started after a man yet but what he brought him back—and one time he brought back three of 'em alone. One was dead and another shot in the leg, but he fetched 'em all back with him—all soul alone too, 'y jing!"

By this time the team was in sight, making good time along the level.

"Yep—that's Hen, all alone!" announced Uncle Jed. "Whoa there! Stop yer hosses and throw up y'r hands! I got a warrant f'r your arrest!" He shouted jocularly as the bays came within earshot.

"Whoa!" said a deep, quiet voice, and the bays stopped. "Hello, Jed! That would be risky somewhere else. I was half-asleep and forgot that I wasn't out West again. A little more and I'd have had you covered."

And Mac could see the big man stuffing something long and dark back into a hip-pocket. Very large and very quiet, with steady blue eyes that always looked you square in the face and a voice never raised above a low, level tone, Sheriff Watson was a man of soothing presence. Even hysterical criminals became docile under his influence. Having pocketed his gun, he asked:

"What's up, Jed? Who is it with you?"

"Had y'r supper, have ye, Hen?" Uncle Jed asked anxiously.

"Yes—over 't the Junction at Squire Compton's."

"Then git out and shake hands with a boy you used to know while I hitch the colts. He's got a long yarn to tell ye, and y' ought to hear it."

"Hello! Stuart McLeod, isn't it?"

Hen was out and holding Mac's hand in an astonishingly short time for so large a man, yet he never seemed to hurry. He shook hands with a steady grip while he directed Uncle Jed—

"Don't water 'em yet, Jed, they're a little bit warm."

Then to Mac—

"When did you come, and what can I do for you, Stuart?"

This time it was much easier to tell his story, for Watson was that kind of a man—a man of sense and understanding, without fear or meanness, who knew many of the twisted ways of perverted human nature yet had kept his own heart clean and strong. He made a perfect listener.

Mac found himself pouring out all his perplexities, even things he had no intention of telling, and at the end Watson sat in silence for some time before he said:

"It all depends on whether or not this man Wheeler has double-crossed you. I have heard of him a little, and from what I have heard I don't think it is very probable. Such men are generally pretty careful to keep their word. Did he ever tell you definitely that he would see you through this thing?"

Somewhat chilled and surprized, Mac cast back in his mind before replying:

"Ye-yes, he did. He said once that he would get the necklace for me, but I heard him promise this Israfil—or Bouvais—that he would——"

"I understand. But he told you he was your friend?"

"Yes."

"You are sure?"

"Yes. At least twice—three times."

"Then I guess we'll come out all right; but I'd just as soon see the thing through. I want to get a look at this Wheeler, and at Bouvais too. I have heard about the case direct from Brine, and I came near going down there last week to look around. Suppose you do find the diamonds in the pond; what do you intend to do with them?" Hen spoke with careful precision.

"Get them to New York—to Huen Ling—and get them sold as soon as possible," Mac said quickly, "if I am not knocked in the head and robbed on the way. That is why I want you with me, and I shall be able to pay well for all the time you——"

"I don't want any pay above expenses," interposed the sheriff quietly. "All I want is the fun of it; and I expect there will be some fun, too."

WHILE he was speaking the big man was biting off and lighting a cigar with deliberate concentration. At the same time the moon had crept slowly above the spruce-rimmed ridge of the Green Mountains; and now its white rays brought out the sheriff's strong face, now grave and grim, with the keen blue eyes looking intently into the black shade of the orchard above the night-pasture.

He stood very still, thoughtfully intent, and as he put the cigar in his large mouth and bit on it Mac noted the ripple of his powerful jaw-muscles under the ruddy skin of his cheeks. Mac grew uneasy under the strain and silence, and presently Watson turned on him his steady blue eyes:—

"Stuart, you know you are sitting into a dangerous game? Are you quite sure you want to go on with it? Right now, I mean?"

"Yes," Mac responded sharply. "I want to know whether I am a pauper or not, so I can go to work if I have to. I have been in suspense long enough, and I want to find out just where I stand."

"Have you got a gun?"

"A gun! No; against the law to carry one anyhow."

"Not in this State."

Watson smiled slowly.

"Here, you can carry anything but a slung-shot, if you know what that is, and carry it concealed. It's a fool law, but it is the law. We have no time to get you one now, either, for we want to do our fishing in the Sucksand before the moon gets up too high. They could see us from the road and all over the country after the moon gets on the water. We haven't got more than an hour. Here comes Jed."

"Goin', Hen? Hooray!" called Uncle Jed as he came up. "Come on, let's get the old flat-bottom out o' the woodshed and get to fishin'. 'Y jing! I ain't felt so kittenish since that time we camped up to Fuller Pond; remember, Hen?"

"I remember you drank up the last pint on us, on the sly," Hen said soberly. "Then I fell in and came near catching my death o' cold for want of a drop of something warm. Is your old scow all dried up?"

"All calked and painted, case I want to go over t' the lake for bass, with a pair o' buggy-wheels to roll her on," bragged Uncle Jed. "And I got a long iron hook made down to the blacksmith-shop—told him it was for a poker to use up at the sap-house. Jest the thing to drag the quicksand with. Everything all handy and ready. Better go round the back way or we'll have the women-folks out here talkin' us deaf, dumb an' blind."

"Lord!" said the sheriff with fervent force. "Talk about talkin'!"

But Uncle Jed was no whit abashed. In fact he seemed entirely free from care, now that the big sheriff was on hand to take the helm, and he ran on like a boy just out of school.

"That's right, I was only talkin'. What I'm goin' to do is go in and tell 'em we're goin' bullheadin' down to the pond, and not to send anybody down there."

While Uncle Jed was in the house Watson stood looking piercingly into the darkness under the trees of the orchard, and Mac asked uneasily—

"Did you hear anything?"

"Not yet," said Hen.

"Do you think they—Wheeler—will show up while we are here?"

"I shouldn't if I was in his place."

Hen rolled his cigar to the other side with one twist of his strong lips.

"I'd wait until we got it, and then take it away from us."

"All right!"

Uncle Jed reappeared to announce:

"'Tain't goin' to take us more'n fifteen minutes. Say, it's a great night!"

Leading the way to the woodshed that extended the house at the rear:

"Say, Hen! M'lissy has got a half a gallon of frozen-cider drippin's hid down cellar, and I stumbled on to it yesterday. Jest wait until we get through!"

"You talk as if you'd been visitin' with it already, Jed," Hen stated.

"Do, hey?" piped Uncle Jed sharply. "Well, I know better'n to git lit up and go shoot all my own sap-buckets full o' holes with a revolver. By crimus! I got more sense than some, if I ain't on the governor's staff. Here we be! You fellers stay here; I know the way in the dark."

He disappeared in the darkness of the woodshed, in spite of Watson's protest, and could be heard clambering up over the clattering stovewood. From above his high voice came down unceasingly:

"Come on in here and stan' ready—don't stand out there and jaw! 'Y jing! Some folks c'n do more heavy standin' 'round and bossin'——"

A grunting pause and a rumbling creak.

"I told Lonnie to put it up on the tie-plates; the darn fool shoved 'er 'way back over the corn-crib; take a span o' mules and a— Hey! You goin' to help any? All dead an' buried down there? By the Gre't Godfrey Di'mond! I'd ruther have one small boy with a head on 'im——"

"Hold on, Jed! Don't try to lift it alone —wait a minute!" called Hen.

"Wait your granny. Stay where ye be! I handled this dum thing more times— There! Now I'm goin' to flop 'er over. You stan' by to ease 'er down. Now je-e-est a minute! I got to lift 'er off'n that j'ist. Have to— Ouch! —— it! No, I *hain't!* Jest butted my fool head ag'in that cussed j'ist. If ye had a spoonful o' brains ye'd git a light, stead of— Unh! Now she's comin'!"

Followed a prodigious bumping and rumbling, with creaks and grunts. Hen called out:

"I tell you it's too heavy for you, Jed. I'll come up——"

"Look out!" yelled Uncle Jed in a strained roar. "Darn near let 'er on to y'r head then—caught 'er jest in time. Too heavy! I c'n lick a ten-acre lot full o' county sheriffs, 'y jing! Now stan' fr'm under; goin' to let 'er slide. Hey! What the— Look out! Here we come! *Wee-ow! Ker-wallop!*"

To an accompaniment of rumbling boat, slithering stovewood and high-pitched, warning shouts Uncle Jed beat the flat-bottom boat to the earth, both arriving in a glorious wood-slide that would have buried the old gentleman alive if Hen Watson had not plucked him from under. He snatched him out by the collar as easily as if he were an empty sack and set him on his feet—just in time to get a thump from the long iron hook that clanged down from above upon Uncle Jed's head.

"Hurt you, Jed?" Hen asked gently.

"Leggo me! Hurt nothin!" pulling away impatiently. "Now see what ye did by blunderin' under jest the wrong time. Ketch a holt here! What ye waitin' for? And, Stuart! You roll out them buggy-wheels and axle—get 'em ready to slip under. Get holt o' the gun'el, Hen, and lift 'er. Does beat —— amazin'ly how useless some folks are born! Git fu'ther this way. Now run 'em under when we h'ist 'er up, Stuart—so't the axle is under the middle. All ready? Then up she goes —Heee-oh! Now, Stuart, get 'em under, any time 'fore tomorrow mornin'. Fu'ther yet. There—let 'er ride!"

And Uncle Jed walked around the awkward craft on its wheeled support, regarding it with prideful triumph.

"There she sets! All right and ready. Takes an old wreck with one foot in the grave and the other all but-ah, as the parson said, to git things done. I swan! I believe the younger generation gets more useless every day.

"Well? Goin' to stan' there and gawp at it all night? Put in that overgrown poker an' the coil o' rope hangin' on the beam behind ye, Stuart, and let's git 'er launched.

"Ho-o-old on! Is that somebody drivin' into the yard? Jest my cussed luck to have some old fool come nosin' round!"

Uncle Jed peered round the corner of the house, waved a hand to them to keep back, and disappeared.

WHEN moved out into the shadow of a pear-tree where he could watch the lane all the way to the pond, and smoked in placid silence. Mac sat on the bow of the flat-bottom. When Uncle Jed returned half an hour later he was thoroughly disgusted:

"Old Zeb Chellis and his wife, nosin' round, jest as I said, to see who 't was we had f'r comp'ny," he snarled hoarsely. "I wouldn't give 'em that satisfaction 'f I waited all night—got more curiosity 'n a red squirrel, and not half as much brains between 'em! We lost 'most an hour now, and 'f you want to ketch the night train f'r the city we got to keep movin'. See or hear anything since I went in, Hen?"

"Not a thing; but there must be somebody watching somewhere."

"Let 'em watch then! Come on!"

Balanced between the buggy-wheels, the boat rolled easily down the lane to the night-pasture, along the orchard-wall in the shade of the trees to the barway in the stone wall that fenced off the pond for the safety of the cattle.

"You're on your own land now, Stuart," said Uncle Jed as they passed through the bars.

"My land? I thought my father sold it all to you."

Stuart was putting up the bars as he spoke.

"All but the pond lot. The description in the deed followed the stunwall, so't this piece with the pond in it was left out," said Uncle Jed. "This piece wa'n't never 'praised nor listed, so't wa'n't sold f'r taxes, and so't belongs to you and your heirs and assigns forever, I guess. 'T ain't mine anyhow. Wouldn't take it as a gift. Look at the darn thing!"

In the dim light and the still night air the pond lay mirror-smooth and treacherous. Near the shore it was weed-grown and the bottom looked black, but in the center the quicksand lay, level and smoothly gray, only a few feet beneath the surface of the water. It looked like a safe floor, but was deadly to any animal that once got in its soft grip and struggled.

Out beyond its middle could be seen two black posts or stakes, their tops above the quicksand floor but beneath the water-level. They were about two yards apart.

There was a dump of "hardheads" along the shore, fruit of many a backache on the farm, and from this the boat was easily launched. Uncle Jed took his station in the bow with the long iron hook—Neptune with his trident. Watson was amidships with the oars and Mac in the stern after shoving off.

As he scrambled in and took his seat Mac felt a chill crinkle his back. He shivered with suspense. Had his uncle been so reckless as to intrust a fortune in diamonds to that treacherous quicksand? And could they find it?

The boat glided out over the seaweed—out over the "sucksand" bottom.

"Looks innocent as pie!" commented Uncle Jed. "Little more on your right, Hen, straight at that first stake. Zeb Chellis used to claim he drove in them locust posts, time he dragged for the McLeod plate, but I know better. My father said they was there 's far back's he could remember, and I bet the old colonel himself drove 'em there. They won't rot, ever, under water. Back water, Hen—whoa! Ease 'er bow on to the top o' this stake so's I can get a purchase to pull an' not spill ye over. Leetle fu'ther—there. Now—hold y'r hosses!"

The flat slant of the bow held the boat insecurely as Uncle Jed got gingerly to his feet. He held the long iron hook ready.

"D-do you know j-j-just where to drag?" Mac asked excitedly, recalling the direction "between two posts."

"Ought to—helped Alan sink the box myself," Uncle Jed snapped, proving that he did not tell all he knew, however much he talked.

In fact he showed another side of his odd nature, now that the critical time had come. He was suddenly clear-headed, efficient and precise in speech as he gave his orders:

"Now sit still, everybody! If I do spill you out, don't kick and flounce around. Just take hold of the boat and keep still. You won't sink if you don't fight it, and it's easy to keep your head out o' water until you're pulled out. That's what the rope is for. So just trim the boat and watch the professor!"

"One minute, Jed," said Hen, who was pulling off his shoes. "Now go ahead."

"Steady on!"

Uncle Jed balanced the boat, standing over the post, and thrust the long hook down—down—and still down slowly and steadily into the quicksand bottom just to one side of a line joining the two posts.

At a total depth of about eight feet he stopped pushing and began to draw the hook across between the two posts, explaining meanwhile:

"May be a little lower—settled. We fastened it to a loop of hay-wire and slipped the wire over both posts. Can't miss it if I get deep enough, and we tried it three times. Careful, now, while I pull up!"

As the old man slowly pulled up on the long iron, Mac fairly shook the boat with his shivering and tried to peer down through the water. But it was already muddied by Uncle Jed's careful strokes. The hook came out of the mud slimy and empty.

"Didn't get deep enough," said Uncle Jed placidly, and proceeded to start the process all over.

Again he thrust the hook deep and deeper into the sullen quicksand, again dragged it slowly across, then up with maddening deliberation.

"Got to go deeper yet, I guess. Must have settled. Might as well— No! By the Great Horn Spoon, I got a bite! Yes, sir, I can feel the hook scrape on the wire. Now don't get excited! Hold her on an even keel—only she hasn't got any—while I drag, slow and steady!"

McLeod was gripping the seat in the stern, and his breath came fast and hard as he watched the long iron hook with the oblong handle on the end, rising very slowly until it was as high as Uncle Jed's head. And still it came up—and up—and up until Mac was sure it had stretched to double length.

Finally the hook itself appeared, dripping mud and water, with a strand of wire upon it. Uncle Jed at last got the wire in his hand and laid the hook down in the boat under the seats.

"Now back up, Hen, so I can slip it off the other post. That's enough—there!"

HAVING freed the wire, he lifted into the boat a small box that dripped with mud. It hung heavy, and he set it down in the stern close to Mac's feet.

"There you are, son! What do you say to the gentleman?"

"Well, by George!"

Hen Watson stared at the little muddy box as he used his strongest oath.

"By George! As easy as that!"

"Wh-what is it? How d-d-do you get into it?" stammered Mac.

He suddenly grabbed at the heavy box.

"Look out! You darn near dropped it overboard and spilled us all out!" said the old man. "Wait until we get ashore. We'll have to cut it open. It's a lead box he brought from Montreal—all soldered up. Just unhitch the wire."

While McLeod removed the wire Uncle Jed took up his long hook again.

"Wait! Looks like something hangin' to that post. Lemme see if I can——"

"Careful, Jed! You're reaching too far," cautioned Hen.

"Careful your granny. Back up a li— Whoa-up! Hey—hold on! Ketch me! Gre-a-at Moses in the bull—*lubb!*"

Uncle Jed floundered overboard, head under. Having lost his balance and thrust the hook into the quicksand for support, the hook promptly pulled him overboard as the boat slid out from under.

"Hang to it, Jed!" Watson called out as the old gentleman's head bobbed up dripping.

"Phoo! Thoo! —— it, so I be hangin'!" spat and sputtered Uncle Jed. "The —— thing keeps goin' deeper, faster 'n I c'n climb! Phoo! Feel like a monkey on a stick! Pull round here so't I c'n climb aboard over the end."

"Quit kicking then; follow your own preachin'!" said Hen. "Wait until I get her nose on the post again, so you won't upset us."

"Think I'm a dum idjit? There—hold still! Stuart, you stay where ye be and hang to that box! Pass over the end o' that rope, Hen. Now set still."

And over the bow clambered and dripped Uncle Jed, never ceasing his comments for a moment:

"'Y jing! Thought I was a goner that time. S'pose I'd got my fool head stuck in the mud! Darn small loss. Course I had to up and spile things—regular Jonah! Come Resurrection Day, I bet ye I bust up the hull show if 't aint all over 'fore I get there. Gosh! That water's cold enough to freeze a brass monkey."

"You want to get into some dry clothes first thing, Jed," said Hen solicitously. "Leave your old poker in the mud—you may catch your death from the chill."

"Chill your great-grandmother's green cat! Back up and lemme get a holt of it. Think I'm goin' to leave it there to tell the hull town I be'n fishin' f'r the McLeod treasure-chest? Never'd hear the last of it all my born days. Back water!"

While the old man struggled with his hook to free it from the clinging sand, McLeod washed the mud carefully from the precious metal casket. He found it hard to realize that he held in his hand the necklace for which men would sell their souls—the bright stones that have caused murder and intrigue—the legacy that would bring him luxury and power. He held it tightly by the ring on top, as if a moment's carelessness would let it escape.

Uncle Jed was having trouble in pulling up his hook. He told about it:

"What — the — nation!" he grunted. "Don't s'pose I hooked into the post, do ye? Can't seem to—budge 'er. Feels 's though I'd got a—hitch on the—hull Chinese Empire. Balance the bo't, can't ye? Now she—'s comin'—slow but sure! I— Swanny!"

The long hook came to the surface with a lump of mud clinging to it—a lump as large as a man's head.

"You got the old colonel's treasure, all right, Jed," Hen said gravely. "Swing it around here, where I can reach it."

Swishing the clumsy weight about in the water to rinse off the mud, Hen presently held it up with a chuckle.

"That's what it is—some of the old McLeod plate. An old pewter teapot, sure as shooting. You hooked into the handle, Jed. Here's an heirloom for you, Stuart."

He passed it over to McLeod.

"Throw it back; I don't want it."

Mac was impatient to be off, and hardly looked at the trophy.

"It's just an old thing somebody threw away."

"Don't ye do it, Stuart!"

Uncle Jed checked the boy as he was about to drop the object overboard.

"It might be silver—ye can't tell. And some o' those old things are mighty valuable. Keep it f'r your children—it's just as good an heirloom as half of 'em. I'll take it up t' the house and clean it up for ye."

"You are welcome to it. Let's get out of here."

Stuart tossed the heavy thing—apparently full of sand—into the bottom of the boat, and Watson pulled the boat to the stone-pile on the margin of the pond.

"Leave the boat right here—Lonnie may want to fish for bullheads from it," said Uncle Jed as he crawled ashore and dripped on the stone-pile. "You fellers can make up your minds what you're goin' to do while I get my clothes changed—it's colder 'n I thought it was. I want to get to the kitchen fire."

But he did not forget to take with him the teapot, only pausing to empty out the sand and water. Then he followed Watson and McLeod toward the house, keeping in the shadow of the orchard.

"Hark!" said Watson, stopping to listen. "I heard horses. Did you put the halters on both those colts, Jed?"

"Think I'd be fool enough to hitch 'em with the lines?" Uncle Jed snapped over his shoulder. "You heard a team on the upper ro'd. Come on! I want to get dry and see what's in this old teapot."

But seeing Stuart, standing motionless to stare back at the pond, he called:

"Come on, Stuart! Paralyzed, or seein' ghosts, be ye?"

"I'm coming."

Stuart roused himself, and did not tell the old man how near he had guessed at the cause of his delay. At the moment, looking back through the night mist that was now hovering over the pond, he had felt a creeping shiver as he saw it take vague, half-transparent form. It seemed to shift and take on outlines, and he was looking at a white Winter landscape!

The pond was frozen from shore to shore, but a long slit had been cut in the ice where the two posts stood, and over this slit two men stooped—stooped and busied themselves letting down a weight into the dark water. And standing over them was a tall figure wrapped in a long cloak, wearing a fur cap and topboots—a figure of long ago—pointing downward. He stood haughtily erect, and as he pointed, giving orders to his servants, he slowly raised his head.

For one benumbing instant Mac thought he could see the great dark eyes, looking straight into his own—eyes like his uncle's, like those he himself inherited; and as he answered Uncle Jed's summons and stumbled after him he muttered—

"I was just waiting for the old colonel."

"Waiting for what?"

Hen turned his head quickly, for his keen ears, alert to hear the sound of trotting horses, had caught Mac's muttered words. But he had something more urgent on his mind. He walked faster as he said:

"You hurry up and get dry clothes, Jed. And I tell you what, Stuart, you better see if you can get Miss Mason to go back to New York with us. Tell her it's not safe for her to stay here. We'll all go together. And if she's going to get her colored woman to go with her we'll have to take her right over to the hotel. There's no time to spare. The sleeper leaves the depot in less than an hour, and we've got to get it."

"That will be great!"

Mac felt a rush of gratitude for the solid sense and cool courage of this man who had come to his aid just when he most needed aid. He fairly ran toward the house, almost overtaking Uncle Jed, who dodged in at the back door.

Mac hurried around to the side-porch, while Watson crossed the road toward the horse-shed opposite. Thus it happened that McLeod entered the open side-door from the porch all alone and carrying his metal casket proudly. He hoped to show it to Mary in triumph, and to make her come with him to the city. She should see that for this time at least he had got the best of Wheeler.

* * *

THE sitting-room was empty, and Mac set the casket down on the table with a newspaper under it. Just then Aunt Melissa entered from the kitchen, calling back to Uncle Jed:

"—tryin' to sneak up-stairs on me! I'll get your dry underclo'es. You stay right there by the fire. Hello, Stuart! What luck fishin'? Where's Mary?"

"What?" shouted Mac. "Isn't she here—with you?"

"No; she went out ten or fifteen minutes ago. She said she was going to meet you in the night-pasture, to see what luck you——"

"My God, he's got her!"

Mac was out and around the corner of the house in three bounds. He shouted toward the lane and night-pasture:

"Mary! Mary Mason!"

Only the night stillness, broken by the sleepy purr of a warm-night frog. And now the whole pasture was in moonlight—nothing there but the silent cows, drowsily champing their cuds.

Mac turned and raced back, around the house and across the road toward the black-yawning horse-shed where he knew Watson was untying his bays. As he came he shouted:

"Mr. Watson! Wheeler has got her—Miss Mason; she's gone!"

"Has—has he?"

Hen stepped out of the darkness, putting a fresh cigar in his mouth, but making no move to light it.

"So are my colts and the buggy—gone. I rise to remark he's some slick operator, your friend Wheeler!"

And he bit grimly on his cold cigar.

"B-But what'll we d-d-do?" stammered Mac. "He's only gone a few minutes. We can——"

"Easy enough, son! Don't fly off the handle."

Hen's deep confident voice was like oil on troubled waters.

"He's got the fastest span in the county, but we will give him a run for his money with Jed's three-year-old stallion. Miss Melissa—" Watson turned quietly to the good woman, who had come running across the road after Stuart—"I don't guess Jed will mind if we take his colt for this business. And it would help a lot if you'd just step down to Lonnie's while we hitch up, and ask him if he has seen a team drive past the last few minutes. Then we won't start off the wrong way—he might head for Middleville. Stuart, see if you can find a lantern at the house—I don't want to get my head kicked off in the dark."

Mac had been fidgeting while Hen made what seemed like a long speech, and now sprang for the house, only to be stopped by Aunt Melissa.

"Here! Here's the lantern—I didn't stop to light it. I'll run down to Lonnie's and be right back. You'll get him, all right."

The good woman was off at a very respectable rate, and Mac fumbled frantically with the lantern.

"Why *didn't* we keep a watch for her?" he almost whimpered. "What will we do if we can't catch them?"

"Just keep going until we do catch 'em. Give me the lantern, son."

Hen took it and lighted it as he spoke.

"Now you come and hold the light while I put the harness on—he 's not any too well broke. "

"If I only had a gun—a Colt!" Mac murmured fervently.

"I got one—that's enough," said Hen. "I never carried more to get three horse-thieves at once. We can take this man on that count, just to hold him."

He was taking the harness off its peg, and the young stallion turned to whinny in answer to Hen's steady tones.

"I know you will, boy," Hen said as if the proud Wilkes colt had said in words that he would do his best. "And I guess we shall have to ask you for every last ounce you got in you. It's a shame, I know, but— Now, now! Just a plain bar-bit—won't hurt your mouth a mite. Tha-a-at's the boy! Not so bad, is it?"

And, stroking the sleek arched neck, smoothing with tender hand the mane, Hen had the harness on the bewitched colt and led him from his stall. When they had the half-broken stallion dancing between the shafts of Uncle Jed's best "light buggy," and all straps buckled, Hen told Mac:

"Now you go get your pewter jewel-chest. This chase may take us all the way to New York, and it's your job to hang on to that necklace. Tell Jed, if he's dressed, to come say good-by to Admiral here. We may have to give him what he'll never get over. You know I hate to do it; don't you, boy?"

Even in his strained impatience McLeod was touched by the sight of the big sheriff explaining to the colt that he might have to kill him. Hen was a horse-lover like all big he-men, and of course all horses felt it at the first smell. Mac was muttering fearsome threats directed at the absent Wheeler as he ran to the house.

The door still stood open. McLeod dashed into the sitting-room. There was no metal casket on the table—only the wet rectangle on the newspaper where it had stood!

"Hey! Uncle Jed! Did you take the chest—the one with the necklace in it?" Mac shouted, snatching at the paper, then hunting frantically all about the room.

From the kitchen came a sound of bumping and hobbling; then Uncle Jed emerged, struggling into his best coat.

"Chest? No—never saw it after we left the pond," he said. "Didn't you come in and get it just now? Somebody ran in since M'lissy left, grabbed something and ran out again. I s'posed of course it was you. Where d' you leave it?"

"Right here on the table. Who could have come in? It must be here somewhere!"

McLeod proceeded to tear up the room, snatching off the sofa-cover and tablecloth and overturning things generally, aided and encouraged by Uncle Jed.

In the midst of their fury they were stopped by a stentorian roar from Hen: "*Stuart! Come quick! Stuart!*" and the sound of cramping wheels from the shed.

Both Mac and the old man ran out into the road, where Hen sat in the buggy trying to soothe the stallion, who was headed toward Stanley Depot. Hen called:

"Hurry, son! They just started—I heard my team swing into the road. He must have had 'em hid up the old wood-road, and he has just started for the train at the depot. Ste-eady! Whoa, boy—whoa!"

"Yes—yes! That's what he did; and he came back and stole the necklace—he's got that too!"

Mac was following the buggy as the colt sprang and danced, trying for a chance to jump in between the wheels.

"Grab on behind!" Hen directed sharply. "Who-oa, boy—so-o-o! Grab on behind and climb over the back! All right, Jed?"

The old man understood.

"Yes, —— it! Kill the best horse I ever owned if you have to—but *get* him! All right—Stuart's in—*go!*"

The stallion leaped, was off at a run and out of sight where the depot road entered the "sugar-bush," just as Aunt M'lissy came back puffing to report that a team had just passed Lonnie's "on the keen jump and headed for Stanley Depot."

XIII

THE wind hissed in Mac's ears as he clung to his seat and stared ahead at the dappled road that swept toward and under him. At his side Watson talked his low-voiced fragments of encouragement to the high-strung colt, while the light wheels spun and slewed from the jerk of the stallion's wild leaps.

For two miles no word was said but Hen's quieting, caressing talk to Admiral. Mac glanced aside—the big sheriff's clear blue eyes seemed to throw a steady beam ahead that never swerved. His hands on the singing reins never moved nor shook; his jaws were clamped like iron on his cold cigar. Slowly but surely he got the crazed colt under control—finally with a sudden mighty heave at the right instant pulled the stallion down "on to his feet." The speed was not diminished, but this long flying trot was a gait that meant more endurance, therefore better chance of success.

Not until then did Hen speak to his companion. "The sleeper is about due at the depot—we go there first."

Mac said nothing because he did not understand. Then it came back to him that this road forked, and that the other fork led to Middleville where the other line of railroad offered a later train for Troy. Wheeler might take either branch—get either train; and the train from Stanley Depot was the earlier. Hen had hardly spoken when there came the long toot of the train whistling for the station at Stanley Depot.

Mac glanced aside at the set face of the sheriff, but Watson gave no sign—did not even slack his steady pull on the reins. He knew his road and his time to a foot and a second, and he had his job in hand.

Already they were within sight of the lights of Stanley Depot. Presently the headlight threw its glare on the little yellow station; then the train came round the bend. A hundred yards short of the station Watson pulled Admiral to a halt—tossing his head and snorting for more—before the blacksmith-shop.

"Anybody come this way with my team, Joe, going to the station?" he called out to a big man who smoked a pipe on his own front porch.

"No. Not a soul but Sile King, drivin' the hotel 'bus, sheriff," deliberately answered the blacksmith, getting to his feet and coming to his front fence. "If anybody started this way they must 'a' took the Notch Ro'd over the mountain. I be'n settin' here all of an hour. Steal your four-year-olds, did they, Hen?"

"Took 'em out of Jed Baldwin's shed," Hen assented. "So-o-o! Steady, boy!"

"Sorry for the cuss, then; you're dead sure to git him," stated the blacksmith. "But he's half-way over the hill to Middleville by this time——"

The rest of Joe's speech was left behind as Hen swung the colt in a wide circle before the shop and let him out on the back track.

Back over the same road they had just traveled they spun at the same light, flying trot. Over the long, moonlit flats, up the long grade and into the black shadows of the maples. Here Hen pulled down to a slower trot, to swing off to the right at the Forks.

Up a shady ravine the road ran beside a tumbling brook. On one side was the steep upward slope of the wooded mountainside, on the other the drop through the bushes to the big boulders where the water rushed and swirled. On a hot, sunny day Mac knew what a delightful drive it was on this "Notch Ro'd," but now it was a heart-breaking climb. Watson quieted the colt, first to a slower trot—purposely making him "break" and canter for a while—then to a walk.

"Here's where he gains on us, with two horses," said Hen. "But Admiral is soft. If we wind him on this climb we're done. And all I want to do is get to Middleville before the midnight train pulls out on the D. & H."

He could take out his watch now and look at it in a break in the trees.

"If she's five minutes late we've got our man," he finally announced. "If not, there's no tellin'. Up, boy!"

Admiral labored up the long hill, broken by water-bars or "thank-you-moms," for minute after long minute, while Mac longed to get out and push but knew that it would do no good. He would tire in a few rods. Then a long, easy grade where the shade was deep.

"Take the lantern out and hold it so I can see. Lower yet. That's right," Hen directed, and shook the reins for a slow trot. "What does he want with the girl? That beats me," Hen broke out abruptly. "There is more to this than a straight diamond-robbery."

"Israfil—or Bouvais—wants her to hand her over to some of those foreigners, as near as I can get it."

Mac groaned at the thought.

"And in return they protect him—give him safe passage on the *Kaiser Friedrich*, which sails tomorrow—with all his loot. I suppose Wheeler will go with him."

"Sounds dubious to me!" Hen observed after a moment. "I can't make it fit in—can't see it work somehow; not in the United States!"

"It sounds improbable," Mac admitted dolefully. "But you know what I told you—what I heard. Wheeler undertook to deliver her and the necklace, and if he gets this train he can make it."

He finished, hoping to be contradicted—"Well, we'll see."

Hen made no other response, bit on his cold cigar and nursed the stallion's strength up the endless climb. It seemed to Mac that it would never end.

At the top of the mountain the trees became short and stunted, then stopped.

They came out into a large clearing, where piles of lumber stood beside the road for "topping-off" loads. As they came out into the clear moonlight Hen looked at his watch.

"Shall we make it?" Mac asked with a choke in his throat.

"A close shave if they're on time," said Hen. "They haven't whistled yet—you can hear from here. That's Middleville."

He pointed down at the lights in the broad valley that spread out below them. They twinkled very small and far, and even as he looked there came to Mac's ears the far faint toot of a locomotive.

"There she goes—and a little late," said Hen. "A chance, and that's all."

He took his time about putting away his watch and arranging his reins, letting Admiral rest his tired legs a few steps more.

"NOW then, boy!" he spoke up sharply. "Show us what you got!" Admiral was rested and ready. He shook his mane gaily and skipped a jump or two; then Hen pulled him into a long, loping run down the mountain-side

Mac caught his breath as they bounced over the first water-bar, caught at the seat and came down in it by luck.

"Hang on!" called Hen as he let out another notch on the taut reins. "This is the home-stretch. So-o-o, boy! Ste-eady!"

He threw back his weight on the bits for the next water-bar, then let out once more.

"Looks pretty hopeless—even if they stop for water—but we'll make one gosh-awful try for it!" he said jerkily as he eased and pulled by turns to keep the colt on his feet. "Easy boy! So-o—easy!"

And down and down they swung—faster and a little faster. At each successive water-bar it seemed to Mac that they would be hurled off into the ravine below, and each time Hen so managed that the narrow seat was under them when they came down. On and down—on and down—the wheels leaped and plunged as they left the road—landed in it again by a miracle.

Mac made up his mind a dozen times that this jump was the last—the next would land them in the tree-tops or the rocky bed of the mountain-torrent below; and at last he lost all hope as well as caution; simply clung and shut his eyes.

Then, long after he had given up and long before he had expected it, they were at the bottom—stretched out on a level road—and the colt was running free and faster.

He opened his eyes to the swift passing of trees and fences. Hen was reaching far out on the taut reins, his eyes still fixed on the stallion's head and ears, throwing his own reserve-power into the running colt and keeping up a steady urging:

"Good boy—hi! Hi, boy, hi! Hep, oh hep!"

With each deep-toned bark Mac could feel the buggy shoot ahead—see the colt leap farther—as Hen seemed to shoot a charge of energy along the humming reins.

Admiral was blowing now, but in great free breaths; and he was doing his level best—keeping his promise to give all he had to the big deep-voiced man who understood him; and all the time he seemed to find that he had a little more to give.

With each booming cry of encouragement from Watson the young stallion let out a notch—stretched his lithe length farther—laid his belly closer to the earth—thrashed the road out behind him with a more vicious lash of his heels. And ever came the demand for speed and more speed:

"Hi, boy, hi!" boomed Hen. "Good boy—steady boy—hi—oh, hi!"

And he swung and eased, pulled and loosed the reins, just enough to drive the mettled stallion speed-mad.

Mac thought they had traveled before. Now he knew better—this was going! Ears flat back and muzzle level, Admiral had got down to the thoroughbred basis of his inborn fighting grit. He was running wild—running his life out of himself to the last fierce gasp.

"It's a toss-up!" Hen's voice boomed above the whiz of the wind. "Now, boy, *now! hep*—oh—*hep!*"

For they were on a long, level stretch—the light of the station straight ahead. Although they were making impossible speed—faster at each boom and bark from Hen—Mac felt sure they had failed. He could see the headlight glare along the station platform.

And there was the train, whistling for brakes and sliding to a stop. And there was still more than a long mile to go.

"Just in time—to miss it!"

Hen howled savagely. He slapped the cold cigar to the other side of his mouth with one motion of his strong lips—clamped it there and reached farther forward along the reins with his big left hand. At the same moment he pulled himself up standing in the swaying, snapping buggy.

Swinging on the bits with his left, with his right he gathered up the loose ends of the reins. Then with a full swing he wound them under the shafts and the colt's belly with a lifting slap, with each slap barking:

"*Hep*—oh—*hep! Hep*—oh—*hep!*"

No matter how brave and willing, no animal can run its best until it is scared—scared and getting away from something. Admiral was doing his level best—but now he did better. To speed-madness was added wild fright—and he ran like a frightened buck, in long frantic bounds.

Mac looked for a place to land—moved his lips with a vague idea of prayer. It would be impossible to stop, to guide the frenzied stallion, and soon they would be at the station.

Soon now, but too late. The train was already unloaded—almost ready to start.

In the distance Mac could see a few passengers getting off the train; then a very few got on. He could not tell whether Mary and Wheeler were among them, because the baggage-truck was in the way—Still almost a half-mile to go!

Now the engine-bell was clanging—the conductor waving his lantern in a starting-signal. The first sharp bark of the exhaust sounded when there was still more than a hundred yards to go. Hen raised his voice in a piercing, high-keyed yell; but the engine-noises smothered it, and nobody seemed to see the running colt coming down the road in the uncertain moonlight. Hen wound his rein-ends around the colt in two last desperate larrups.

"Throw out that robe! Get ready to jump!" He shouted to Mac.

McLeod obeyed. Now his feet were free. But now the train had slid out beyond the station-platform and was gaining speed with every quickening puff.

The road ran beside the track for a short distance beyond, then swung off and away. McLeod saw what Watson had in mind—got his feet under him as they tore past the station, through the scrambling passengers, out on the parallel bit of highway beside the moving train——

"Now—*jump!*" Hen roared, and swung the sobbing colt sharply away from the track.

Mac was spilled out—while he was still in the air Watson flung away the reins and leaped after him—caught Mac's collar as he landed on his feet, and leaped for the car-platform on the rebound. The small crowd on the platform came yelling enthusiastic admiration of the feat, trying to get the attention of the rear-end brakeman, who was *not* at his post.

Mac felt himself yanked on the moving steps—flung against the rail, which gave his head a stunning whack, just as Watson came piling atop him.

Half-unconscious, he still tried to cling—to climb—saw the car-door open; and out of it came Wheeler!

WATSON still hung to Mac's collar with one hand. The other he flung up to guard his head—too late. McLeod saw Wheeler's lithe movement—heard the dull thump of a blow—and Watson fell upon him heavily, dragged him from the carsteps, and rolled with him in the gravel of the road-bed, wrapped in a mutual embrace.

As Mac got drunkenly to his feet he stared through a dance of fireflies after the dwindling end of the train. A figure on the rear platform waved a mocking hand. The engine hooted in derision—the rear end slid round a curve and vanished.

McLeod, still groggy and staggering, felt his hat clapped on his head. He turned to Watson, a streak of blood on his cheek but still biting on his cold cigar that was now only a stump, brushing the dirt off himself. He picked up his hat and poked it into shape, saying dryly:

"I said we'd just about miss it, and I just about hit it, didn't I? I will say that boy is a smooth worker—that Wheeler—and I like his looks. We are not quite licked yet—come on!"

He started toward the station along the track, followed by McLeod, and they met the small knot of bystanders who wanted to know. The sheriff wiped his cheek with his handkerchief and called to the station agent, who brought up the rear of the curious—

"Say, Martin, can you flag her at Hawksbridge?"

"No—ain't any operator on the night-trick there tonight," was the prompt answer. "They got orders through to Troy. What is it, sheriff? A murder?"

"Not yet," said Hen grimly, making his way through the knot of spectators who were underfoot. "Gangway, please! Come on, Stuart—we may get him yet."

Mac knew that Hen said this mainly to lessen his embarrassment, for the crowd were already looking at him askance as a prisoner, and they at once became officious with offers of assistance. He was still hopeful, however, for he had more confidence in the sheriff every minute that passed.

The station agent admitted him and Watson into his little sanctum, shutting out the populace.

"Want to send any wires, sheriff?" he asked, forefinger on the telegraph key and third finger ready to kick out the switch.

"Yes. In a minute."

Hen's keen blue eyes took in every detail of the little office.

"What's that green light for?"

"A bunch of bigbugs coming on the Minnehaha—running fifteen behind the sleeper. I got orders for 'em. They'll be along 'most any time now."

And the station agent left his key, stepping to the window to peer up the track and listening with head on one side.

"Whistlin' for the upper crossin' now, but you'll have time to send a wire or two before they get in."

"Is the governor along?" Hen asked.

"I guess likely. They been on a fishin'-trip up the lake. Want to send that——"

"Here's where we have a piece of luck, Stuart," Hen broke in. "We'll try for a lift as far as Troy, and get to New York right on our man's heels. If the governor's aboard, we will. Martin, you send this—" scribbling rapidly as he talked—"to the station police at Troy, and the same to Wm. J. Brine at New York. Didn't I see Jim White the liveryman out there?"

Martin, already calling Troy, nodded silently and Hen hurried out to give orders as to the care of the three horses. Meanwhile Mac made use of a clothesbrush loaned by the station agent.

When Hen came in he was looking so thoughtful that McLeod asked:

"What's the matter? Is the colt going to—to——"

"Colt's all right. Jim is cooling him off. So are my bays," said Hen soberly. "That's what gets me. That man Wheeler can't be a criminal—those horses have hardly a wet hair on 'em. He hired a boy to blanket 'em and walk 'em around."

"He's not a criminal, but—look what he has done!" said Mac.

"I know," said Hen. "But I can't help a sneaking feeling that there's a joker in this game somewhere. If he wanted to make a getaway with the loot, here he was right at the beginning of the 'underground' into Canada—by way of the lumber-camps. They come all the way from New York to make use of it—it's well known to all the crooks—but he takes the back-track to the city. He certainly has got me guessing, this Wheeler."

"You will come on with me to New York, just the same?" Mac asked anxiously.

"You couldn't stop me. I want to know the answer. But I don't see where we can get him this side of the city, for he has got everything—brains, nerve and a pull!"

Seeing Mac's dejection, Hen added:

"Don't look so glum, son. I am betting on us yet at the finish, for I don't believe your friend is going to throw you down."

The Minnehaha came rolling into the station, trailing a Pullman sleeping-car. She was a unique thing. She looked like a parlor-car that had swallowed an engine, and that was what she was. When the

Mountain Maid became too light for the increasing trains she had to haul, she was replaced by a heavier engine. Then she was enclosed in plate-glass, polished wood and plush upholstery, christened Minnehaha, and became the triumphal chariot of high officials and their distinguished guests.

McLeod followed Watson to the front of this imposing private conveyance, where a handsome, gray-haired gentleman stood on the brass-railed front platform, gazing at the moonlight on the mountains. He looked very remote and unapproachable, and Mac trembled at Hen's assurance. The sheriff said quietly:

"Good morning, governor! Give two tramps a ride to Troy?"

The austere magnate looked around in surprize, and then he was down the ornamental steps pounding Hen on the back and pumping his hand.

"Hen Watson—you darned old bloodhound!" he beamed with delight. "Where did you hole up all Winter? And why didn't you come duck-shooting with us? We had a big time, and we missed you. Come in—glad of your company. The rest of 'em are all abed in the Pullman and I'm lonesome. Come in, you and——"

"Governor Wilcox, this is Stuart McLeod—you remember his father."

Hen brought Mac forward, and presently the young man found himself in a soft armchair up alongside the encased boiler, looking out through a large plateglass window at the sliding landscape, while Hen and the governor talked out the fishing-season lengthwise.

He listened with interest to reminiscences, learning that these two had tied knots in each other's shirts at the old swimmin'-hole, etc.; but the comfort of his chair, the rhythm of the wheels and the swing of the outside world past and under him was too much for him to resist. Within a half-hour he was asleep.

"HERE we are, Stuart!"

Hen laid a heavy hand on Mac's shoulder.

"We have to get out here."

"Where—where are we?"

Mac struggled to get his eyes open.

"Coming into Albany, and the train *they* are on may be here yet," Hen said. "I will watch on the other side. You keep an eye out here as we pull in through the yard. If their train is there we want to jump it, if we have to climb on the car-roof!"

There was nobody else in the Minnehaha as the private-car-locomotive rolled slowly across the bridge and into the station.

"This looks like it, on this side!" Hen called, and McLeod hurried round to look over the sheriff's shoulder.

On the next track a train was moving parallel with them, and faster, so that the cars passed the window in slow review within an arm's length. But the windows of the sleeping-cars were dark—the shades drawn down.

"All asleep in their berths," Watson commented. "But watch for the smoking-compartment at the end of the car."

The lighted compartment at the end of the last car came abreast of their window.

"There he is—look!" Mac shouted, seizing Hen's arm and pointing.

In the Pullman's smoking-room, almost within reach, Wheeler sat alone. He looked up into their faces, absently at first, then with recognition. His long, level-lidded green eyes lighted with a gleam of purpose; he raised a hand and made a downward gesture of repression, once repeated, and his compelling gaze for the moment held them motionless and staring. Then the window slid past—was gone.

"Come! Jump the rear end!"

Watson was out on their own front platform, railed and higher than that of the receding car, with Mac behind him—too late. The tracks here swung apart; they clanked over a switch—and the train bearing Wheeler was out of reach, gathering speed as it pulled out through the yard. It would be suicide to attempt to run after it.

"He meant, 'Keep out!' That's what he meant."

Watson stared after the vanishing train as the Minnehaha slowed down and stopped.

"And he had me paralyzed for a second. What an eye! Follow me—we may catch the Chicago Limited and win out yet!"

Pulling Mac from the platform, he was off, across the maze of tracks. Now blinded by the glare of a headlight, now dodging the back of a switch-engine, they ran and zigzagged for the station-platform.

XIV

THE big waiting-room of the new Albany station was echoing to the booming call of the announcer: "New York train! Train for New York!" when McLeod followed Hen through it on the way to the telegraph window. But they were not half-way across the room when both heard a soft voice say distinctly:

"Don t hurry, Mac! Where are you going?"

It was the big sheriff who stopped the quicker, and Mac stumbled on his heels as he turned to face the speaker. It was a stately old lady, tall and thickly veiled, who stood nearest. Mac was staring about for another possible person when the old lady lifted her veil, long enough to give a startling view of the oval face and great dark eyes of the artist-detective, Bridget McDevitt.

At the same time she moved aside to a secluded corner as she murmured—

"I've something to tell you."

"Perhaps I'd better get off that wire," Hen said to the younger man; but he kept his keen blue eyes on the veiled lady. "No time to waste."

It was she who answered.

"I think not. You wired enough from Middleville. You are Sheriff Watson, from Vermont?"

"Hen, this is Miss McDevitt," Mac interposed. "She is an artist, but she does detective-work, and she is on this case."

"Glad to meet the young lady," said Hen without further ceremony. "What is the news?"

"That Wheeler is to be shadowed but not stopped," the girl said rapidly. "I have a lot more to tell, but our train is just about to start. Come!"

"But he was on the train from Montreal," Hen said. "Just pulled out. We saw——"

"No—it only took on two more cars. That's our train, with him on it, and I have a state-room in one of those two rear cars. We can talk there."

Bridget was hurrying them toward the tracks as she spoke.

"I have your tickets, and a lot of orders and dope."

"Dope? Who are you going to dope?" asked the sheriff, trying to catch up.

Hen was not quite up to date in Manhattan slang, and the girl gave a little musical chuckle as she explained quickly:

"Information—'dope-sheets' at the races, you know; tells about the horses. And I'm awfully glad I got you—Mr. McLeod. I was afraid I'd miss you. There are the boys!"

Mac turned to see Reggie Willing and Steve Collins, both of them trying to look unconscious and free from care while they kept an eye on Bridget as well as on the other boarding passengers.

"They insist that I need a body-guard, in spite of my dowager make-up," she whispered as they came to the car-steps. "I told them I might as well travel with a brass band, and they are being as sleuthy as they know how. Reggie has knocked down only one man so far. He looks like such a mamma's-boy!"

In fact Reggie was watching at that moment; and, seeing Watson take Bridget's arm at the steps, he came up on the run to growl in the big sheriff's ear:

"Hands off!" and then in a stage whisper to McLeod, "Will I smear him one?"

"All right, Reggie! Sheriff Watson," Bridget hissed over her shoulder. "You patrol the train and see we're not interrupted."

Thereupon Reggie glared at the Pullman conductor savagely and turned a slow crimson as he subsided.

"It's lucky this trip doesn't require secrecy," said Bridget when they were seated in the state-room.

She removed the stifling veil, showing her face to Mac's deep delight.

"But those boys may come in handy yet," she continued. "Now for the situation in New York: This Spark Gang case has stirred up a tremendous excitement in official circles. Everybody rushing about and saying, 'Hush!' and nobody seems to know just what it's all about. I doubt if even the chief, Brine himself, knows all the facts; but I can tell you this: This man Israfil, or Bouvais, is an international crook. He has got something that they are all afraid he will let loose!"

"Let loose?" Hen asked.

"Some secret—something dangerous," said the girl in a whisper. "Something that, if it got out, might mean big trouble—perhaps a war!"

"Who told you that?" Hen asked, his steady blue eyes on Bridget's.

"I will tell you who told me, to make me realize," she said. "It was the Department

Secretary himself. He came on from Washington last night. Mr.——"

The name she spoke was that of a man of world-wide fame, and after a silence Watson asked—

"What is to be done?"

"This man Wheeler, as I said, is to be watched but not interfered with. He is to be shadowed, in hopes he will lead us to Israfil and Captain McGuire—who have both disappeared."

The girl was watching McLeod as she talked.

"Do they know that Wheeler is in it with Bouvais—that he is working for Bouvais," Mac asked breathlessly—"and that he has got diamonds worth nobody knows how much? He has got the necklace my uncle left to me, and he has got Miss Mason."

"How do you know she did not come willingly?" Bridget asked quickly.

"I—I don't know it," said Mac. "In fact, I think she d-d-did."

"Well then! She is of age," Bridget reminded him sharply.

"B-B-But—with Wheeler—and going to this crook, Bouvais! A girl like her——"

"Why shouldn't she go with Wheeler?" Bridget asked with a quick smile. "I can tell you, young man, that she is not the only girl that would follow such a man, no matter where he went. But you need not worry; she will be taken care of before Bouvais can get her."

"W-W-Would you follow him?"

Mac leaned forward intently.

"Ahem!" Watson said suddenly. "Suppose I take a walk?"

"No—not *now!*"

Bridget answered Mac with a direct and meaning look. Then to Watson with a flash of white teeth:

"Don't think of it, sheriff! We are not spooning. Mac, here, is too much in love with Miss Mason for that. And I have more to tell you. Listen, and try to believe!

"IT LOOKS as if this man Bouvais, who has been a famous clairvoyant and all-round imposter known in many cities of Europe, has actually hypnotized Captain McGuire. No other theory will explain the way in which he has kept his thefts a secret.

"Moreover he has some place of hiding that the police have not been able to find, and no doubt he and McGuire are there now, waiting for Wheeler to deliver this last big haul of diamonds before they go aboard the *Kaiser Friedrich*, which sails at noon tomorrow—today, I should say. That is what we hope to prevent."

"Who is 'we'?"

It was McLeod who interposed the abrupt question, and the beautiful Bridget looked at him a moment before she answered—again smiling without apparent reason:

"*We* are the chief, J. W. Brine, and all who are working on the case under him. That includes us three. I suppose that hypnotism stuff sounds rather thin to you, sheriff?"

"No, ma'am. Not if— Do you believe it?" Hen said soberly, and then he too was favored with one of those flashing smiles.

"That was rather nice, sheriff," she said. "You see that, being a woman, I make everything personal. Yes. I do believe it, and I'll tell you why. This Bouvais at first had Carlson the masseur working for him, and Carlson did all the dirty work—ran all the risks. Carlson treated McGuire for neuralgia, got him asleep on the table, put him into the 'suggestive stage' and then handed him over to Bouvais. The same process may have been applied to others, but in his case it certainly worked. Mr. McLeod has studied the subject—he can tell you that it is quite probable."

"I thought they didn't take much stock in that stuff, for criminal purposes," said Hen. "But suppose that was the way of it. What then?"

"Nothing, unless Bouvais has got control of Wheeler in the same way."

Mac smiled at the thought of anybody hypnotizing Wheeler; then he recalled the night when Wheeler had gone to sleep on Carlson's table, just as had McGuire.

"He did!" he announced. "I went with Wheeler to Carlson's when he had an attack of neuralgia, and perhaps— But I don't believe it! And whatever is the reason for it he can be stopped—he's got to be stopped! He is on this train, and I'll go to him and tell him so—right now!"

He was on his feet before he had finished, but the girl's hand was on his arm.

"Wait! You will do no good, and you may get hurt—please don't?"

"But do you expect me to sit still and be robbed?" Mac asked. "He has the diamonds that belong to me, and now is my chance to get them."

"Listen!"

Bridget got up and faced him, close—so close that her big dark eyes made him dizzy.

"Will you wait here for me a few minutes? I promise to come back within half an hour, and I ask you to do this thing—just for me. Will you?"

And no man worth the name could refuse the pleading in the dark eyes.

"Of course I will! But I don't promise that I will stay afterward," said Mac. "And I trust you not to——"

"Do you think I'd betray you?"

After one direct look the deep eyes were hidden by the heavy veil, and she was gone as silently as a ghost.

"*There* is a girl for you!" was Watson's comment after a short silence. "Is she one of the regular Central Office detectives?"

"No. She is a sculptress, and only does this work on certain cases—I don't know why. She doesn't have to; she has money and social position."

Mac was answering gloomily and absently.

"She seems to have been struck by Wheeler. I would like to know what she is going to do now. Why shouldn't we just go and take him—or the box he stole?"

"You can't prove he's got it," Hen said. "Better leave it to this girl—she's a winner."

And after a moment's thought he added:

"And we don't know what damage we might do. You look about played out for lack of sleep. Lie down there and get a nap. I will wake you up."

"I slept an hour," Mac protested; but as he sat listening to the rumble and clank of the wheels his eyes kept closing. The thought of the stolen necklace would prick him awake; his promise to wait would make him impatient, and he fidgeted in his seat. Presently he exploded:

"Hypnotism! Poppycock! That's just a part of his bluff—something to keep us all fooled, and this secret that means war is another bluff. I am sick of it!"

"You are talking in your sleep already—or going crazy," said Hen. "You better lie down and get some more rest. You can't sleep sitting up."

"Not until she comes back. I want to see what she finds out."

He had hardly spoken when a knock at the door made him start. It was the porter with a folded bit of paper. Mac opened and read:

Come to the second car ahead. Tell nobody.
B. McD.

"Where you going? Don't be trapped!" Hen said as McLeod got up.

"Back in a minute."

Mac was gone, and Hen decided to wait a few minutes. He waited a long time.

Through the swaying cars Mac tottered, between swinging curtains, through narrow passages. It was in the second passage that he heard a soft click behind him, and before he could turn his face it was wrapped in a thick cloth. He was jerked backward through a door that snapped shut and held down on a couch while a needle jabbed sharply in his back.

Struggling against a strength that handled him like a child, he was bound and stifled so that he could not make a noise. His struggles became weaker, his head more confused and dizzy; he relaxed, and found he could breathe easily in spite of his gag and the cloth about his face. Try as he might he could not fight off the drowsiness that swept over him—he slept.

THERE was a time when he was half-roused—conscious that he was being shifted about, carried in a jolting vehicle. Later he was again hauled about more roughly and again carried for a distance; and he smelled the dank, foul air of underground even through the heavy cloth. He knew he was being taken through the old conduit.

More hauling and stuffing of him—he was pulled and hauled up a ladder, thrown on a board floor and kicked in the stomach. Thereupon he became unconscious once more. When he was roused the next time it was by having the cloth pulled away from his face and a light flashed in his eyes.

"There is the fool who has made so much vork. He will make not much more—you shall finish him yourself if you want."

It was the voice of Israfil, or Bouvais, with his peculiar periodic German-French accent. He was speaking to some one beside him.

"Leave him there until we have finish the others; the time be-comes short, and we have much to do before the boat sails. All are here and ready—to get their pay—they *think*—yes?"

Now Mac could see the face of Bouvais—a new Bouvais—shaved so that it now showed its evil cunning and fierce bloodlust. The light-grayish eyes had the feral glare of the eyes of a fox or wolf—unwinking, ready to kill and devour, with no other possible purpose. There was nothing human in that lean, evil mask whose thin lips writhed in a smile that showed sharp wolf-teeth.

"But I get mine—don't doubt it!"

Mac started at the sound of Wheeler's slightly hoarse voice, and in the dim light saw the level green eyes, watching and alert, on Bouvais.

"Sure! Sure you get yours!" whispery and treacherous. "You have de-liver the necklace in its little box, the young woman in the closed carriage. Wait, you, in the room be-yond the hall, until I deal with der Baron von Armen and the fools upstairs. Then we shall di-vide it all—yes?"

Bouvais reached a hand as if to pat Dan's shoulder—drew it back as he met the green eyes—then darted to the dark corner of the room to conceal the metal box containing the necklace. Mac got a glimpse of it in the ray of the bull's-eye lantern as Bouvais put it in a hole in the rotting wall. Wheeler too was watching lynx-eyed as the master-thief came toward him.

"Wait only a few minutes—and hurry! I hear von Armen—I will scare him, bloff him as I have bloff the oders. Quick-lee!"

Silently Wheeler disappeared in the dark doorway. Bouvais flashed the light all about the ruined walls, on the square hole in the floor with its ladder leading down, then placed it so the light fell across the hole directly on the open doorway. Smiling and obsequious, he stole to the door and listened to steps on the stairs.

"This way, *Excellenz!*" he called softly. "Be-ware the brok-en stairs! All is prepared. You come alone?"

"Yes, alone. Pah! What a smell—like a dead-house!"

A man in a silk hat stood in the light, his hard German face expressing disgust and contemptuous authority.

"Show me that nothing will be left to make trouble for us after we have gone. Then I will go aboard to report. Otherwise you get no protection from the Prince or his staff—you understand? And do it at once; I am sick from the stench!"

"Certain-lee, *Herr Baron.* All in one glance—look!"

With the bull's-eye he threw the ray down through the trap, pointing.

"See you, down through that other hole is the only trace of the old sewer now remaining. Already you haf seen the other ends closed by the explosion; you know that the papers vill report it as an-other Anarchist plot that haf failed, against the consulate—yes?

"And in the wall below there you see the fuse? See also the rags and refuse soaked in coal-oil? One little match, and in ten minutes all is in flames—it is one pile of tin-der—the blast will bring down all the adjoining brick wall!

"All burned and buried! Even der hole will col-lapse for many yards. They can find—noth-ing!"

Bouvais finished with a wide gesture of triumph.

"Nothing of the hole; but what of the men—of those who might tell?"

"Ah—*ah!*" sweeping both hands before him, palm up. "The same—the same—you shall see that they go the same way!" craning his neck to whisper, "*All of them!*"

"Burn and bury them—alive?" with some sign of horror.

"Onlee one or two—the oders you shall see vit your eyes!"

With the threatening cruelty came the marked accent, German. When he was ironic, Bouvais' speech showed the French strain. Now he stepped to the door and called:

"Doucette! LeBlanc! Come at once!"

He used French to the men, but said to the baron in English—

"They come for deir pay—dress' for a fête!"

Mac, watching from the floor, sensed the malicious joy in Bouvais' whisper, but he was not prepared for the horror that followed so quickly. Nor was the baron.

Through the doorway came the heavy, awkwardly dressed-up figure of Doucette. He clumped forward stolidly. His coarse, pock-marked face furtively alight with anticipation, he was thinking of the debauch in Montreal that his money would buy for him.

After him stole the lean and cat-like LeBlanc, smirking with conceit and obsequiousness, his beady eyes on Bouvais—waiting.

AT A NOD from the master LeBlanc flipped a long thin blade from his belt, lifted and drove it deep into the neck of the man before him—inside the collar-bone and toward the heart—with a soft hissing thud as the haft struck bone.

Doucette's silly grin flew wide; his face twitched and spread to a mask of terror, pain, and foolish surprize. As the knife was jerked out he bowed, toppled forward—blood gushed from his mouth with one drowned cough—and his knees buckled under him. A thrust from the foot of LeBlanc, and the heavy body pitched half over the edge of the square hole in the floor, slid over, slithered heavily down the ladder and vanished.

Below was the sound of the soft fall—then a muffled rustle twice repeated as the limbs jerked thrice—then silence.

"Thus, you see!"

Bouvais waved a graceful hand, looking down the hole to make sure the body lay still.

Then to the stunned baron he said:

"Next, ob-serve what is this hypnotism that is so moch laughed at. LeBlanc, sleep!"

With a snap of his fingers he turned to LeBlanc, clapping his hands smartly in his face with the word—

"Sleep!"

LeBlanc stood, knife in hand, grinning his wizened, conceited grin. At the sharp report and command he jumped—his muscles sprang taut and his features jerked, strained as if he were in pain; then his eyes dulled—closed; he swayed where he stood. Before he could fall Bouvais said in French sharply:

"Open the eyes! Give me the knife!"

The beady black eyes opened—stared blankly; and LeBlanc held out the bloody blade. As he took it Bouvais went on with his barked commands:

"About face! March! Halt! To your knees!"

With each, LeBlanc moved like a puppet—turned—took two stiff steps—dropped on his knees at the edge of the square hole as if praying at the death-pit of his victim.

Bouvais followed him—two steps; and as LeBlanc came to his knees Bouvais raised the knife. Without an instant's pause he drove the blade into LeBlanc's neck-base, downward and inward, as LeBlanc had stabbed Doucette. Softly the blade slipped home—quickly Bouvais jerked it out—gracefully he stepped back and turned to the baron with a bow and a wave of pride.

But the baron, open-mouthed, was staring at the leaping and jerking figure of the murdered man. The shock of the blade had seemed to send an impulse to all the muscles. The kneeling figure sprang into the air—flung arms and legs all abroad—opened wide its mouth and staring eyes. For an instant it poised thus in the air, as if sustained without support, a wild picture of shrieking horror.

But no sound came from the gaping mouth—only a gush of blood as the grotesque figure dropped out of sight through the square black opening. It was gone; but before the eyes of Mac on the floor and the baron above him that wild picture seemed to stay, painted on the background of black darkness.

"Thus, you see!" Bouvais said, smiling maliciously. "And yet they laugh at hypnotism! I have another very good subject, *Excellenz*. If you would——"

"Enough! Out from here! Led me oudt!"

The baron's accent came out with his terror.

"I haf seen e-nough!"

And he reeled toward the door.

"You will re-port all is safe, *Excellenz?*"

Bouvais followed part way, leering at the baron's back.

"Provided you make your way to the boat—I have nothing to do with any trouble with the po-lice—I go!"

The baron stumbled from the room and down the stairs, leaving Bouvais cackling softly to himself:

"I haf them all! I am Bouvais, *moi!* And they dare not ar-rest me, for fear of the se-cret. Hah! Great is the power of *bloff!* Now for the other two—there is just time."

Looking at his watch, he called softly at the door across the hall:

"All ready, captain. Come!"

THIS time it was the missing McGuire, captain of police detectives, who came forth and looked at Bouvais as if for instructions. He looked about as usual, except that he seemed to see nothing and nobody but Bouvais. His eyes, too, had the same intent but submissive stare that Mac had seen in the eyes of LeBlanc when he was under hypnotic control.

McLeod felt a wave of sickness at the realization that McGuire was in the same condition. Would be meet the same fate? Mac closed his eyes. But Bouvais spoke with eagerness:

"You haf seen the girl? Wheeler has brought her in the carriage?" he asked.

Mac opened his eyes.

"Yes, she is in the carriage—unconscious. Shall I take her to the dock?"

Bouvais seemed to hesitate, watching McGuire suspiciously. Suddenly he decided to make sure of his control. As with LeBlanc, he clapped his hands with the word—

"Sleep!"

Followed the same muscular rigidity, the same working of the face, and the same period of relaxation with the closing of the eyes. Then Bouvais commanded rapidly:

"You see nobody but me. Open the eyes. Walk across the floor and back to me!"

McGuire opened his eyes and marched obediently until his foot struck McLeod, when he fell flat, picked himself up with no sign of surprize and completed his trip. On the way back he repeated his fall, still gravely unconcerned, and Bouvais was satisfied.

"Take the young lady to the boat; see that she is not uncovered as she is carried aboard. You know what to say," he directed with distinct precision. "Then drive the carriage to the mouth of the alley. I shall be there, and we shall both go to the dock again. We shall both go aboard. Let nothing stop you, and return at once. Go!"

Without a word McGuire was gone, and Mac found he was struggling with his bonds—struggling in vain. He could not even turn over, and his legs were numb.

"Ha! You haf not long to live—be content!" Bouvais snarled at him. "You and your friend Wheel-aire—you shall burn with the other cattle. —— ——!"

He checked a flow of oaths and abuse in Canadian *patois*, to look at his watch and rush into the hallway for the last time.

"Now, Wheeler!" he called. "Come at once!"

Swiftly he darted to the corner where he had hidden the metal box, took from the hole in the partition two flat pouches on a strap and buckled the strap about him under his coat. Thus the pouches were concealed at his sides, although they made his coat bulge perceptibly. The metal casket he laid on the floor by the door and crouched by it, revolver in hand and aimed at the doorway.

In the full light of the bull's-eye, that brought out the door-casing like a frame for the picture, Wheeler appeared. He stood erect and almost smiling, his delicately chiseled lips half acurl but with a threat in their careless scorn; and his long level eyes glittered green and clear as they swept round the room.

"You are not armed?" Bouvais asked with finger on the trigger.

Slowly Wheeler turned on him the green glitter of his gaze, and his lips curled more grimly as he said:

"No. I don't need a gun or knife."

And he added—

"What's the use of a gun between friends?"

"Put up your hands!"

Bouvais stood up, tense and alert.

"I prefer to be safe instead of sorry. So! Now turn about and stand still—do not move!"

Raising his hands, Wheeler turned slowly and permitted Bouvais to stroke him with a swift, sensitive hand to make sure he carried no weapon.

"Now you can put them down."

Bouvais still kept his gun aimed as he gave the permission, and Mac still held his breath as he watched. Why had not Bouvais shot Dan down in cold blood as he had killed the others? Would he yet shoot him when the time was ripe?

Wheeler lowered his hands, still carelessly cool, looked at the gun aimed at his chest, took note of Bouvais and the bulge of his coat. He may have seen the metal box on the floor close at hand, but he gave no sign—simply looked the room over until he came to Mac, lying in the dim light beyond the pit of dead bodies.

Then the green eyes narrowed; the keen face became viciously threatening.

"You promised I should deal with that man!" said Dan.

The hoarse whisper made Mac turn sick and cold. He had never been able to feel that Wheeler was actually a traitor to him. He looked up into the fierce, benumbing eyes—threw into his gaze all the appeal of his suspense and horror—and his heart suddenly leaped up in his throat to choke him: For the level glitter of the eye farthest from Bouvais suddenly disappeared—Dan had deliberately winked at him!

In the ecstatic rebound of his spirits McLeod shut his eyes and did his best to hold his breath, for fear Bouvais would see and suspect. But his blood was drumming in his ears. Dan was with him! Bouvais was speaking:

"Yes—he is yours to finish, and he is scare al-most to death already. Do it quickly—with your hands alone; we must be going. And you want—*what is coming to you!*"

He finished with a hoarse, choked tone that Wheeler seemed not to notice.

"You and I will get it," he said slowly: "what is coming to us."

Bouvais sprang back with a lithe noiseless bound, well out of reach, and held Dan covered; his finger trembled on the trigger.

Wheeler stood still, carelessly contemptuous, his lips a bit curled and his long eyes leveled on those of Bouvais. The master-thief and hypnotist acted like a man struggling with a vertigo of dizziness. He held the gun steady, but his face became for the first time white and tense. He raised his left hand and waved it across and across between them.

"You will sleep as you have slept before— You are going—going— Sleep!"

He spoke with tense monotony.

Mac groaned aloud and bit his gag as he saw Wheeler stiffen—saw his face lose its forceful lines and draw with a painful struggle. Paralyzed with incredulous horror, McLeod lay still at last. No use in struggling—Wheeler was gone like the others, for the green eyes had closed and Dan swayed helplessly.

"Open the eyes, and finish your man—quick!" commanded Bouvais with relief and triumph in the ring of his voice.

Wheeler opened his eyes wide—turned them down toward Mac's face—craned his neck for a pounce. His hands came out—ready—those smooth, fatal hands; and for an instant Bouvais lowered his gun to watch and enjoy. He was a ju-jutsu artist himself and appreciated fine points in man-handling.

The next instant Wheeler had Bouvais' gun hand in his grip—the two athletes were motionless, eye to eye in a hand-to-wrist lock, and the gun pointed up to the ceiling. The final fight was on.

McLeod had already shut his eyes for what was to come. He opened them on a scene that was too much for him to realize. It had come at last. Wheeler was fighting for the life of both of them, against a man as skilled and as strong as he; and Bouvais was armed to boot. Besides the gun in his hand, he still had the long knife hidden somewhere about him.

There was a moment in which all the world seemed hushed and waiting—all movement at a stand-still.

XV

IN THE strain of their opposed strength all the power of each man came into play. Bouvais feared to make a sudden effort lest it lead to his undoing, so he brought all his vicious determination to bear on bending down that gun against Wheeler's head or chest—one shot would end it.

The floor shook with the tremor of their straining muscles.

Bouvais saw he could not gain a hair, and the grip on his wrist was crushing. He was too keen to be mulish—to deceive himself; Wheeler's grip was too much for him, so he took a gambler's chance.

Loosing his three outer fingers, he let the gun swing on his forefinger, through the trigger-guard, and as it dropped muzzle-down he fired it by a sudden upward jerk. Free in the air, the gun went off with a deafening crash; the recoil flung it spinning almost to the ceiling; it dropped—vanished through the trap, and splashed into a pool of stagnant water.

Wheeler lost his hold—staggered; blood showed on his temple as he fell backward at the margin of the trap-door. Head and shoulders fell over the edge—his back bent, feet came up, and with a slow back-somersault he disappeared to join the two corpses already in the death-trap. Bouvais had taken a chance and won!

Mac was conscious only of a sick dropping at the pit of his stomach. He gazed stupidly up at Bouvais, who was peeirng down into the place of dead men, his grin of savage victory spreading on his scarred face. It was impossible—not right or fair! After all this that had been done and suffered—Wheeler beaten?

Bouvais darted across the floor for the bull's-eye, brought it to the square opening to throw its ray down. He would make doubly sure.

What was he peering at? Was he in doubt? No. He set down the lantern and felt in his pocket for a match, snarling at McLeod—

"You vill all burn together! Get a taste of hell on your vay! No time to fool vith you, but perhaps I make sure."

He drew the long knife as he spoke, still streaked with blood which he had not wiped off in his fierce excitement, and crept toward Mac with a smile of irony.

"May I tr-rouble you for a match?" he asked politely. "After I haf——"

The knife was already raised when Mac saw Wheeler's bloody head emerge through the hole—it was just about to come down when Bouvais heard Dan's step on the ladder, and he leaped to his feet as Wheeler sprang.

Bouvais thrust as if he held a sword—level at Wheeler's bowels as he came. Dan writhed aside and caught the wrist, and once more they were at it, dodging and striking, leaping and crouching; and by a miracle of unhuman skill and quickness Wheeler was still unwounded except for the bleeding furrow on his head.

Once he had to take both hands to Bouvais' knife-hand. He had slipped in his own blood and fallen—Bouvais driving a downward stroke to pin him to the floor.

With a movement impossible to any other man Wheeler caught the descending wrist in both hands—writhed from under it as he swung it hard down and aside—and in that lightning movement he so added to the force of the blow that the blade was driven deep into the floor. Bouvais either had to let go before he could wrench the weapon free or else have his arm broken.

At last it was man to man on even terms as the two rolled over and to their feet.

The quick, lithe movements that followed were almost meaningless to Mac, who watched and tugged at his ropes. He knew that the quick shifts, seizures and breaks, feints and retreats were due to the even and deadly knowledge of the Japanese man-handling art. Both knew how to break a limb or a joint with one motion or hold, and one move amiss meant mutilation and death, for this was a no-quarter fight with nothing barred. One man must die or two, for Bouvais' triumph meant death for Dan and McLeod.

Still the battle went on, in silence broken only by the hard breathing of the fighters. Mac had wriggled loose enough to be able to roll over; he worked his feet toward the knife sticking in the floor, got one ankle on each side of the handle, pushed them down until the keen edge came across the ropes, then pulled. One strand of the thick rope was severed; then the knife pulled loose. His feet were still bound, but he could move them a very little.

He had hoped to get more freedom, perhaps to be able to help his friend Wheeler in his fight for the life of both of them, but now knew it all depended on Dan. Even the sound of the revolver-shot had not brought any help, and Wheeler must fight it out with Bouvais alone.

Mac kept fighting with his bonds, especially with his gag, which seemed to be coming loose, as he rolled over to get a better view of the savage contest. In the ray from the bull's-eye as they crossed it the two seemed evenly matched, and Mac was astounded that any man could stand before Wheeler, whom he had believed unbeatable. But Wheeler's caution proved that he knew Bouvais was dangerous all the time—he was giving him no opening for a fatal hold.

Even as McLeod was noticing Wheeler's stealthy caution, he saw Bouvais steal a glance toward the metal box near the door, and heard Wheeler growl between forced breaths:

"No you don't, Bouvais! I'll get you yet! You helped—kill Jem Slater. I'll get you for that—anyway!"

Even as he spoke he made a lightning grab for Bouvais' arm—had it in an elbow-breaking grip—and slipped in a smear of his own blood on the floor.

Dan was down, losing his hold, and in a flash the tables were turned—Bouvais had Dan's wrist and forearm across his knee. With a snarl of triumph Bouvais threw his weight on the wrist to break the elbow-joint.

Wheeler whirled his feet up and over his head in a backward roll-up, saving his elbow by turning the joint over, but Mac heard the shoulder give way with a gristly crunch. Wheeler came to his feet and free, but with his right arm hanging helpless—palm forward.

Bouvais rushed him—driving for his stomach—Wheeler sidestepped but was swept backward over the brink of the death-pit. He caught Bouvais by the coat with his unhurt left hand—dragged him down—and they both slithered down the ladder into the darkness.

With a tinny rattle the light also disappeared in the room where Mac was—in their fall the fighters had somehow swept the lantern with them—and Mac was left in absolute blackness. From below he could hear the panting scuffle still going on.

He began to work himself to the edge of the hole, attracted by a red, smoky glare that suddenly appeared through the square opening; and at the same moment he got the gag out of his teeth.

REACHING the trap, he got his head over the edge—peered down into the cellar where the fight still raged. The lantern lay, flaring smokily in a bunch of oil-soaked rags that it had set afire. By the flickering red light he could see the two corpses of Bouvais' first victims at the foot of the ladder, one lying across the other, while over and about them darted and swayed the swift-moving fighters.

Wheeler was the more active, circling about Bouvais and striking, feinting, while Bouvais shifted to face him—on the defensive. For Bouvais limped on one leg that had been injured in their fall, and Dan had only one useful arm, so the match was still fairly even. One false move—one lucky hold—the slightest advantage would turn the scale for one or the other.

And the fire in the rags and refuse was gaining; in a few minutes the place would be in flames. The fuse in the wall would soon be fired, bringing down an avalanche of bricks and débris that would fill the whole cellar. In the corner was the hole where the rough board ladder led down to the old conduit, which would fill first.

As the flames crept along the dry refuse toward the fuse, Mac noticed Bouvais working toward the ladder that led upward to the room where he himself lay. Bouvais was planning to swarm up the ladder, pull it up after him and escape, leaving Mac and Wheeler to burn and be buried.

Twice Bouvais made the attempt, and twice Wheeler stopped him by a quick rush and retreat, snatching him from the ladderfoot, but darting out of reach before Bouvais could grasp and disable his one good arm. The second time Dan landed a straight jab at Bouvais' jaw that staggered him.

If luck had not for the second time been against Wheeler he would have got his man then and there; but his foot caught under the arm of the dead LeBlanc and threw him almost flat. By the time he had got his feet Bouvais was facing him. Again they struck and parried. Now time was almost up, and each man knew the finish must come soon—still Bouvais had the advantage of both hands in working order.

Up above, Mac realized the critical moment and was struck by a thought—he would get the knife in his teeth, now that his gag was out, and, kneeling on the edge of the hole, he would cast it at Wheeler's feet. With desperate energy he wriggled himself around end for end—found and bit upon the handle of the knife. As he rolled over and got to his knees he could taste the blood still on the weapon. With short half-inch hitches of his bound knees he shuffled to the rim of the hole and bent over it.

Wheeler was wearing his man out with marvelous endurance and agility. Already he had Bouvais bleeding from nose and mouth from his quick left-hand blows, but a full-weight smash would be his own undoing—give Bouvais a chance for one of the simplest and most fatal holds; so he darted about and jabbed him like flashes of lightning.

As Mac watched he saw the blazing rags about to fire the fuse—saw Wheeler leap aside and kick the blazing pile away, postponing the end for a few more seconds. Poised, balanced on his knees at the edge, Mac was directly over the fighters now—he was filled with a fury of determination to do something to help Wheeler, no matter what the consequences to himself. Could he cast the knife where Dan would get it first?

At that instant luck or the dead LeBlanc seemed to intervene again—to decide against Wheeler, whose foot landed in a pool of LeBlanc's blood—and again Dan slipped horribly, fell toward his helpless side.

At the same instant Bouvais sighted a piece of scantling at his feet almost—the blazing rags kicked aside by Dan had uncovered it—and Bouvais pounced on it as Wheeler fell. Dan was prostrate and dazed, his only hand raising his shoulders, as Bouvais raised his heavy club for a smashing blow.

Mac, on the edge of the floor directly overhead and poised to toss the knife from his mouth, saw Dan could not profit by the weapon now. Too late? No! Bowing his head and shoulders, he threw himself forward and down, curling himself into a ball as he fell.

Like a thunderbolt from the heavens he

descended upon Bouvais. His balled-up weight landed fair between Bouvais' shoulders—smashed him face down atop his two dead victims and drove all the breath from his laboring lungs.

"There!" grunted Mac with a great outrush of breath as he rolled aside. "Take the knife and finish him!"

"Good leather!" panted Wheeler, on his feet and snatching up the weapon that Mac had blown from his mouth with his fall. "I knew it, Mac—I knew it!"

He pulled Bouvais over on his back, with one stroke of the knife cut the narrow strap that held the leather pouches to Bouvais' sides, and raised the blade again.

Mac shut his eyes.

"HERE! Open your mouth!"

At the hoarse command McLeod opened both mouth and eyes. Dan thrust between his teeth the strap with both the pouches made fast.

"Hang to it like a bull-dog!" he cried, tense and indomitable.

Bouvais lay kicking feebly as Wheeler cast a quick look about—no time to go up the ladder for the box holding the necklace. Dan saw the flames already about to cut off their only retreat—the hole into the old conduit—and the ladder was a ladder of fire.

He kicked the still smoking dark-lantern ahead of him, down the hole in the corner—the one leading to the old conduit—repeating—

"Bite on that strap!"

He dragged Mac with his one hand like a sack of meal to the hole—hand gripping Mac's collar, he shouldered him at the short ladder of boards—with him he plunged and slid to the bottom. Along the rough passage he panted, never letting go and never ceasing to kick in the half-dark at the smoking lantern that now and then gave out a plopping flame, until he had got Mac and the long-suffering bull's-eye several yards up the incline of the brick-paved floor.

"There!"

He let go of Mac's collar to set the lantern upright in the trickle of water on the floor. "I knew it! I told you I had a hunch all along!"

And with his last words came a puff of air from the exploding blast. The roof and walls of the conduit itself came crunching and grinding down, almost to where Dan stood. He grabbed Mac and pulled him farther up the incline, but the rest of the walls held fast, and Wheeler let out a long breath of relief as he sat flat down on the wet floor. For the present they were safe.

XVI

THE lantern having smoked and plopped in its shallow pool of water, finally decided to burn with a fairly steady flame and to give a ray of dim light along the bricked passage. Wheeler seemed to have been waiting for this.

"I thought maybe the oil couldn't all run out," he observed as he got his breath, "and I expect it will come in handy. First thing is to get you cut loose."

Coolly he got out a pocket-knife and opened it by holding the handle in his teeth. When he had at last sawed Mac's ropes and helped him rub some life into his limbs, Dan had got his breath enough to give expression to his moderate triumph.

"Well, Mac, we win all but the necklace. Sorry! It's the first promise I have fallen down on, and I'll make it good somehow. But I want to use this arm—only the shoulder is out—and you'll have to help. Lie down on your back, and shake hands."

With Mac on his back, Wheeler lay down alongside, head to feet, with his useless hand clasped in Mac's, and gave directions:

"Hang tight. Put your foot under my armpit. Now—*pull!* Harder— *Yow!*"

The joint came in with a gristly crack, and Dan was on his feet, white but ready for anything, trying the restored joint.

"She goes—be lame tomorrow," he announced, his eyes on Mac all the time as he worked the shoulder. "I smell gas. Bring those bags and let's get out of here. That's all we've got to show for our work—those bags."

Dan started along the passage, carrying the lantern, and Mac followed with the bags. Presently Wheeler said once more—

"Yes, sir, I knew it all along!"

"What do you mean? Why do you keep saying that?" Mac snapped.

Dan turned and swung the light.

"I knew you had it in you to come across in a pinch. That high-dive stunt, now—if I had been as bad off as I looked, it would have just saved our bacon."

"——!" Mac was bitterly gloomy. "That does cap the climax. Mean that my hero act was all for nothing—you were playing 'possum?"

Wheeler stopped him:

"It was a good stunt all the same—and who knows— But look here! What is gnawing you? Is it money? We lost the necklace but I told you——"

"Not the money!" Mac interrupted in turn. "It's what I can't get without it. If I had money I could— But what's the use? Let's go on!"

Dan did not move.

"Is it the girl, Miss Mason? I have said I'd see you didn't lose out."

"Yes, it's the girl—but not Miss Mason. Where is she?"

He halted short.

"At the VanSanvoord's by now. She's all right. But—but look me in the eye, son."

And in Dan's narrowed eyes the dancing lights had never looked so keen and mischievous.

"You swear it's not Mary Mason? Say it again!"

"It is not, but just as bad," Mac responded sadly. "Miss McDevitt has money too—and she is too fine——"

"Mac! Mac, you Red Indian!"

Wheeler's face was all alight, magnetic with a warm and generous affection.

"I'll make you king of the world inside twenty-four hours after we get out of this hole! This is the plumb limit! This is the— Come on—drill!"

And with one clap on Mac's shoulder Wheeler was off up the incline. It was plain that he was at his very keenest, suddenly overflowing with happiness he could not keep to himself.

"We are the people! We own the earth!" he chanted as he went. "First off, your uncle was crazy I don't think! He held out on Bouvais—all the diamonds were not in that box; ask Huen Ling! And—*say!*"

Words failed. Dan shook himself with a shiver of ecstatic delight and threw a look over his shoulder.

"What? Is that right—you're not lying to me?" Mac panted after him.

"Did I ever? Wait and see!"

"No—I beg your pardon—but I am about all in. Perhaps it's the dope you shot into me—perhaps it's because I have been kicked around and treated like a dog generally. What was the sense in that? What was the sense in all of it?"

"Plain as your nose!"

Dan turned on him.

"Can't you see there was no other way to get him—Bouvais—to make him think I was double-crossing you? He'd have been out of the country now but for that—almost made it as it was—and I had to get him and his load, all at once; and he was the only man who knew where he hid it! Come on! Chewing the rag won't help. They're digging for us at the sanitarium by now. Hang to the bags and drill!"

"I'm drilling—I hope it's all so!"

Mac could not help being uplifted and cheered by Wheeler's confidence, and he followed on with rising spirits. He did not clearly understand why all the plotting and counterplotting had been necessary, or how it was to be brought about, but he grasped the idea that Dan saw light ahead. If they could get out!

As Wheeler had said, they found that men were at work in the sanitarium subcellar. When they reached the collapsed side passage the sound of picks and shovels could be heard, and their shouts were answered at once.

MEANWHILE, at the dock, the *Kaiser Friedrich* was all ready to sail—"All ashore!" had sounded—when a tightly closed carriage drove up swiftly. It stopped where two uniformed ship's stewards were waiting with a litter. They had waited until the last minute and were about to give up and go aboard; but they now hurried to transfer the helpless invalid, wrapped and closely veiled, from the carriage to the litter.

But before they could open the carriage door things began to happen in bunches. As the two uniformed foreigners set down the litter alongside, Reggie Willing shouldered the nearest steward and told him—

"Some mistake here; this is a friend of mine."

"Stand back! Or you vill get hurt!"

The foreigner made a threatening move.

"You'll get hurt anyway," Reggie responded cheerfully with his favorite swing to the jaw.

Down dropped the steward, and his running-mate landed atop him as a result of a similar exchange of civilities with Buck Collins. The crowd surged round to see, with a policeman trying to cleave his way to the carriage.

Meanwhile big Sheriff Watson from

Vermont had snatched open the carriage door and plucked thence a veiled woman. He set her on her feet with the remark—

"She doesn't look sick," to the spectators generally.

"I am not sick. This is a plot to carry me off!"

And the lady whipped off her veil. The bystanders caught their breath at the beauty of Bridget McDevitt. She saw the officer, and commanded him—

"Arrest that man!"

She pointed to the driver of the carriage, Captain McGuire, in a low-pulled hat and upturned collar that almost concealed his face. He looked dazed and wild, as if suddenly waked from sleep, and instantly lashed his horses.

The horses plunged; the crowd scrambled for safety.

Watson leaped for the reins and swung upon them, all but dragging McGuire to the ground and pulling the team back on its haunches—thus saving the limbs if not the lives of several bystanders. Then the reins broke. McGuire insanely lashed the horses, which sprang forward through the parting mob.

Straight down the dock they tore, frantic with fright—crashed through the railing. Horses, carriage and crazy driver disappeared with a huge splash, to the accompaniment of shouts and screams from the dock.

There was more shouting and scurrying about—orders for fire-boat and river police—and in the midst of all the confusion the liner slid out of her slip. McGuire's body was first recovered, his head laid open by a chance kick of a struggling horse; and Hen Watson came to where Bridget was waiting with her two self-appointed body-guards.

"Dead!" he reported quietly. "He can't tell us which one of those shacks on West Street it is, and the fight there must be over by now anyway. Hadn't we better go straight to the sanitarium?" he asked the amateur girl-detective with serious deference.

She was pale now with anxiety as she answered: "Wheeler's orders were to look for the fire—the ruin on West Street where the fire would start. If he was not there it would mean either that they had to go by the old conduit back to the sanitarium, or——"

She choked and turned away.

"Come on! Where is our carriage?"

"Now don't lose your nerve!"

Collins took her arm and faced her about the right way.

"There's no man living who can down that man Wheeler; he's broken worse men than Bouvais, and he's sure to get him."

"Perhaps."

Wiping her eyes, Bridget looked up at him.

"But I am thinking about—about Mac. I helped get him into that trap, because I thought it would help him, and now——"

"And now he's all right!" Reggie put in stoutly. "There's your fire already—go to that fire, and drive like——!"

The last to the waiting driver.

It was a horror, the next half-hour. At the blazing condemned tenements they could find no sign—get no news—of anybody in the vacant buildings before the fire broke out. The two-story wooden building where the fire had started was already a blazing heap of ruins.

"There's only one chance left—that they are in the conduit; and that's a small one."

The girl was white with despair and suffering as she gave up the search. She turned to Watson in her extremity.

"Take me to the sanitarium, please!" covering her face with her hands.

"We'll find 'em there—or find 'em digging 'em out."

Hen's consolation was confused but well-meaning.

"Tommy is there to show 'em the place to dig, and I feel it in my bones they're all right."

Bridget understood, and clung to his big hand all the way. Only once she said: "This is the last time—the very last time—I do any detective work! And if——"

She couldn't finish, but swallowed hard and sat in stony silence.

Collins and Reggie sat opposite, aching with sympathy and itching for a scrap with anybody at all.

Half a block from the sanitarium they found a crowd across the street, which was roped off. Inside the ropes six troopers sat their mounts like images, while policemen handled the crowd outside the barrier.

"I guess we'll have to show your ticket, Miss McDevitt."

As Collins spoke gently, Bridget uncovered her eyes. She took one look at the crowd and the cavalrymen, and her eyes turned upward as she swayed against the big sheriff. Then she handed Collins a card with a hand that shook feebly.

"I must come—please!"

She appealed to Hen to help her out, and he walked with her through the lane that Steve and Reggie opened with scant ceremony.

At the ropes a Goliath in blue and brass recognized her. He passed them through as he rumbled confidentially

"Not any reporters with you? All right then. No—all I know is, some crazy Anarchist tried to blow up the consulate, and they dug out some bodies or somethin' at the sanitarium. They're in there now, holdin' some kind of big pow-wow, and the Secretary from Washin'ton is in there."

The walk from the ropes to the sanitarium—half a block—was described by Hen later as "the worst journey I ever traveled." It was done in silence except for a dazed mutter from Reggie, twice repeated—

"The Secretary from Washin'ton!"

For it was a name world-famed and world-respected, beyond almost any other.

The policeman at the sanitarium door did not need a look at the card. He waved them inside with a courtly:

"Plenty of room in the reception room for your friends, Miss McDevitt. No—not a thing; but there comes a man can tell you, if he will."

He indicated a young plain-clothes man who came from the office into the empty hall, hurrying for the reception-room door. At sight of the group he stopped, looked at Bridget's tragic face—like the face of a beautiful marble Diana—and came to her.

"Larry!"

She caught at his sleeve with a little sob.

"Tell me, who were the—the bodies they dug out? Who was k-killed?"

The fear in her big appealing eyes, the trembling of her lips got him by the throat.

"Why, who—what— Bless your big little heart, nobody's killed! They dug out this man Wheeler and young McLeod, alive and kicking—cleaned 'em up and got 'em in there now. Who's been conning you?'

To the girl he looked an angel.

"*Larry!*"

The girl choked now.

"You wouldn't lie to me! Are you *sure?*"

"Sure? Didn't I see 'em? And help wash 'em off? But I got to fetch in— Here! Tommy! Get a glass of water—carry her into the reception room——"

"I'm *not* going to faint! I— Oh-h—ha— Please stop me!"

And the self-poised girl showed signs of hysterics, signs checked by the appearance of a figure in a linen duster coming in at the open door. It was Uncle Jed Baldwin, carrying an old-fashioned carpet-bag and an "umbrell' "—a regular Denman Thompson make-up—but perfectly at home and frowning savagely.

"WHAT the Tophet's goin' on here anyhow?" he demanded. "Somebody assassinated the janitor of Tammany Hall? I been rakin' this town with a fine-tooth comb f'r a man with sense enough to— Hello, Hen! Hello, Bridget! What's matter?"

At sight of the girl the old gentleman's keen eyes softened. He became kind and fatherly in an instant.

"What you crying about, girl? There—there! I'll take you right home in a minute. I was comin' to see you anyway. What they been doing to you, hey!"

He patted the girl's back with the hand holding the umbrella, for she had taken refuge on the front of his long duster, and glared at the men over her shoulder. Seeing in her face that she was upset with happiness instead of pain, however, he made another lightning change—becoming peremptory and busily efficient.

"Where's the rest of 'em, Hen? How'd you come out? Get y'r man? All right? See you later at the hotel then—Grand Union; I got business to talk over with Bridget. She's just the one I been lookin' for. Gosh! Ain't it hot?"

"One moment!"

Larry had been flying about on his errands as messenger for the conclave in the office, and now checked the girl.

"Were you at the dock, Miss McDevitt? They want to know what happened. Are you well enough to tell them?"

"Not by a long shot, she ain't!" Uncle Jed announced. "She's goin' home with me where she belongs. You pick on somebody your size. Take Hen there!"

"Sheriff Watson was there," Bridget told Larry, "and he can tell them better than I. I am through for good! See you all this evening. And, sheriff, will you do me another kindness—you have been so good to me?"

She pulled Hen down to whisper in his ear, and he nodded gravely.

"Here! Darned if I have my girl spoonin' with another beau right 'fore my face an' eyes! Come along here, or I get another girl— Say! Either o' you young men know Miss Mason? Jest telephone her it's all right; they won't let 'er out, an' she's all a-twitter up t' the house."

And Uncle Jed took his charge away proudly, while Watson followed the plain-clothes Mercury, who conducted him before the Olympian council in the back office. They sat at a table, the great man from Washington at the head as chairman. The cool and competent sheriff felt shy about appearing before the Secretary, whom he had admired at a distance for many years. His shyness would have been greater if he had known that the young commissioner of police at the Secretary's right hand was one day to choose the older man for his Secretary of State.

Also present were VanSanvoord, the great banker, and Hueng Ling, who, Hen thought, must look like the Emperor of China. At the foot of the table sat McLeod and Wheeler, the latter with his head bandaged, and both looked as if they had witnessed something they would never forget.

"Sheriff Watson," said the Secretary easily, "they tell me you can tell a story clearly in a few words. Will you tell us what you saw at the dock?"

"Yes, sir. I will."

Hen took the chair indicated and waited. The Secretary smiled a small suppressed smile of appreciation as he said:

"Please do so. That is what I meant to have asked at first."

"I saw Captain McGuire drive a carriage to the dock," Hen said deliberately. "We took Miss McDevitt out of the carriage. She called on an officer to arrest McGuire. McGuire whaled his team and they ran off the end of the dock—man and horses crazy —and they pulled McGuire out dead."

"McGuire never spoke?" The Secretary asked.

"He never spoke."

There was a silence of impressive weight; then the young commissioner said with grave emphasis:—

"By George! An act of Providence has saved us again!"

"I think that is what we all feel," said the Secretary solemnly. "And it seems obvious that we can save much trouble by closing this matter here and now. Is that the sense of the meeting?"

Silent assent was given, and for a time the wise diplomat seemed absorbed in thought. When he spoke again it was with a hushed reverence.

"Again it seems that we have been preserved from the results of our own heedlessness. Who can doubt our future? And again—" he turned to the young commissioner—"we have been lucky in having the right man in the right place in a time of peril. I think you agree, sir, that this matter might better stop right here, and that the statement given out to the press should give only the facts that appear on the surface?"

"I certainly do."

The commissioner was blushing, but spoke with grim force.

"I only wish," he added, "that these two young men might be more publicly rewarded, and that Mr. McLeod might be paid for the loss of his fortune. Is that not possible?"

He asked the question of the grave banker, VanSanvoord.

"If I may interrupt."

The smooth, cultured voice of the Chinese gentleman broke in, like a note of a 'cello.

"Now that the arch-criminal is gone I am freed from a promise made to Alan McLeod. I am glad to be able to assure you that the young man did not lose all his inheritance. His uncle did not entrust all the jewels to the quicksands, but removed a few of the finest stones. He gave them to me with the instructions to sell them and turn over the proceeds with certain conditions now fulfilled. Therefore I take pleasure in transferring to the rightful owner the sum of one hundred thousand dollars. It surely was a wise precaution on the part of a man much criticized, not to entrust all the legacy even to the Sucksand Pond."

While Mac was dazed and uncomprehending, the Secretary said with a bow of deference—

"He left them in much safer keeping—those finest stones—in the hands of an honorable gentleman,"

After this exchange of civilities had been followed by congratulations, it was evident that the Secretary still had something weighty to get off his mind.

"Gentlemen!" he said, waiting for perfect silence. "As you *are* all gentlemen and Americans, I charge you not to reveal anything you have seen or heard in this room beyond what shall appear in the statement to the press. Especially is it important to make no mention of the document here destroyed. Some of you have no idea of its contents—those had better refrain from speculation even in private. Those who have some inkling of its nature—and there are two, I believe—will not need to be enjoined to silence. They know the danger to themselves.

"And that is all, I believe, except the payment of the reward to Mr. Wheeler. The unclaimed jewels made up a large sum, but no more than is due to his resourcefulness and flawless courage."

As he finished, with a bow to the crimson Wheeler, the Secretary turned to the weighty banker. That gentleman seemed reluctant to let so much wealth go out of his keeping. He rose with one of the leather pouches in his hands.

"It is indeed great wealth to come so suddenly into the possession of a young man, but in accordance with the terms of the agreement I hereby bestow the reward. I trust that so much wealth will be wisely handled."

He passed it across to Dan, holding it in both hands, with as much ceremony as if it were the crown of England. Dan took the pouch by its strap with the dry remark:

"Thanks. I'll try not to jump off the dock with it."

The great statesman at the head of the table got his handkerchief to his face just in time, for he had an unconquerable sense of humor; but his forehead turned crimson. The great international banker saw it, and never forgave Wheeler for his flippancy.

XVII

AT A STAG dinner of celebration at the Grand Union that night Wheeler was in high feather, showing unsuspected talent for story-telling and leaving the company weak after his imitation of the Rolling-Mill Man in his sober-drunk impersonation.

All the time, however, he kept a watch aslant upon McLeod. Mac showed frequent spells of pallid absent-mindedness that dampened Wheeler's spirits. When they left the table and broke up into pairs, Dan came to where Hen Watson sat alone in the lobby, having been lately deserted by McLeod.

"Where'd Mac go? What's the matter with him?" Dan asked. "I tried to divide up with him and it only made him sore. It must be the girl."

"You hit it. Sit down."

Hen made room soberly.

"He's got a fool notion he has got to have more money than the girl or he can't ask her. Afraid she'll call him a fortune-hunter and turn him down, I suppose."

"Only one cure for that," said Dan. "And I'm going to try it on myself. I always said I wouldn't marry, but I am going to try—tonight. All I am waiting for is to see Mac on his way to Miss McDevitt's studio."

"Needn't wait any longer then," said Hen. "He's on his way now."

"Are you sure—dead sure?"

Dan leaned forward to ask tensely.

"Dead sure—I gave him her message and he started so quick his feet slipped. There's a sort of conspiracy between her and Uncle Jed. What's wrong with you—you gone crazy, too?"

"Da-de-di—Dum—Tum-tum—Tum-tum!
Da-de-di—Dum—Tum-tum—Tum-tum!"

sang Dan for sole answer.

Thus tunefully intoning the air of "The Beautiful Blue Danube," he waltzed around and about the lobby, apparently unconscious of any other people in existence, to the great admiration of all beholders. For Dan was always graceful as a leopard, and he waltzed a good second to the idol of those days, H. E. Dixey, circling the lobby twice, he waltzed out at the front door without hat or coat—as he was, in evening dress—and disappeared toward Fifth Avenue.

"He didn't drink as much as I did—and I'm cold sober," said Reggie Willing, who came up with Piet VanTwiller 2d. "What's hit him?"

Hen told what had happened. Piet and Reggie looked at one another with tragic foreboding.

"She's a goner," and, "I knew it!" they said in unison, meaning that neither of them could propose to Mary Mason again. Then they faced about to look at each other in desperate silence.

"Well—what about it?" Piet asked at length. "What to do?"

"I think," said Reggie, reaching for Hen's arm to raise him to his feet, "that the Governor of North Carolina must have had this same pain."

With Hen between them, arms locked, they rambled in search of the remedy.

MEANWHILE Mac had got coat and hat, then dodged out at the ladies' entrance on his way to the studio where Bridget had sent word she would be waiting. Hen had almost driven him out after delivering the message, but now Mac knew he could not have helped himself—his feet took him there in spite of him.

Never had the large room looked so restfully simple and beautiful as it did that night when he stood alone in it looking for its lovely owner. He had left his hat and coat on the usual chest in the hall, entering without knocking as he had been told, and stood feasting his eyes on the sweeping curves of arch and column. For the room was finished in a Grecian fashion—lofty and spacious with a cloistered purity of outline—all in gray and white.

And in this setting he saw her coming toward him, once more in the simple white robe that left bare her arms and shoulders, left her slender curves unbroken and untortured by stay or strap—a thing too vital and too perfect to be real.

Yet as her nearness made him thrill to the sheer magnetic womanhood of her he was swept off his feet, his mind washed clean of all resolve and inhibition by the wave of longing that took him. He stood waiting, looking.

"Why didn't you want to come? Didn't you want to—see me?"

Her low, sweet tone was without a hint of coquetry, but with a note of frank appeal. She was a thing too beautiful to dare approach—he dared not believe his ears.

"Want to—want—? W-Why, you perfect, glorious thing—can't you see that I have loved you all the time? Don't you know I want you to madness—until I forget I have no right to ask for you?"

She dropped her eyes as if he had reproached her—dropped the long lashes and clasped her hands before her as if in penance; then looked up again with a child's shy appeal.

"Are you—quite sure that you—you want me?" she whispered doubtfully.

"Don't torture me, girl!"

He clenched his hands and took one stride toward her, only to hold himself, trembling.

"I can't stand any more. One more word, one look, and I shall— Oh!"

His breath came out in full-lunged sob.

"Why then, Mac—" raising the lovely, cool arms—"Why not—just take me?"

IT WAS an hour later that she broke away to get something to show him. She returned with a necklace on the brilliant curve of her neck, such a necklace as he had never seen nor dreamed of. He was no jewel expert, but he knew that the blazing diamonds and emeralds were costly beyond figures he had ever heard, and it gave him a sharp pain of delight and sadness.

"It's beautiful—like you—but—" he turned away—"I can never give you things like that.'"

She came to hold him still.

"Things! I should think not! Do you know, Huen Ling says he was offered—but never mind the figures. Perhaps, if you make a great success as an architect—" here Mac blushed at the new ambition he had tenderly revealed—"you may be able to give me this one. *Then* who could call you fortune-hunter?"

"Don't! It hurts," he said, and meant it.

"Oh, you unsuspecting innocent!"

She got him round the neck.

"You *must* have suspected! It *is* yours—the old colonel's jewels! Look at me—it is true. It was in the pewter tea-pot, buried in wax and soldered in. Uncle Jed brought it in his carpet-bag, and Huen Ling cleaned it himself this afternoon. See! The stones are really strung on this gold wire—they can't do that now—and it is worth fabulous sums, if we ever want to sell it. Shall we?"

By this time Mac was collapsed on a couch and being held down, therefore in no position to dictate terms. It was rather overwhelming, and it took time to encompass the thought of the old colonel with the same McLeod blood in his veins burying this wonderful jewel—for whom, in those days of stock and spurs? He could at least make his bride a princely present now; and the very richness of his delight was a bit too much for him, and he was mopping his eyes when Uncle Jed appeared—or was heard behind the big door-screen.

"Say when! I ain't goin' to stay behind

this fence forever. I can be 's unselfish and fairy-godfatherish as the next man, but darned if I twiddle my thumbs in this corner all night. I wan' to see how the old colonel's necklace looks when it's all fixed up and on the handsomest girl in the United States. C'n I come out now?"

Uncle Jed was still talking when Bridget brought him out, and the first sight of the necklace was too much for him too. He had nothing to say for at least ten seconds of breathless staring. Then he let out a long, whistling breath—

"Whe-e-e-ew!"

He never took his eyes from Bridget.

"I always said there were no girls like I used to know—but I'll say right now I never saw anything to hold a candle to that necklace, or to the girl inside it. Stuart, I wonder 'f you know what you got? You're the living image of your aunt, Bridget."

And Mac found his eyes wet again as the old gentleman raised the girl's hand to his lips with a bow worthy of David Garrick. For he recalled that it was this aunt of hers who was said to have been responsible for Uncle Jed's persistent bachelorhood.

IT WAS the day before the double wedding, when Wheeler and McLeod were both shivering with fear and suspense, that Dan said:

"Stop figuring about all this stuff you don't understand! Let it alone and let me alone. I don't know any more about it than you do, and you will get into worse than trouble. You come with me to headquarters before you ask another fool question." And he took Mac to Huen Ling.

At the house of the great merchant, when they had been taken to his room of state and their host had made sure nobody was within hearing, this is what Mac heard:

"Stuart McLeod, you have chanced upon certain things that have roused your curiosity. For your own safety I warn you to forget them—never speak or write of them to any person or persons. Avoid any mention of a Nameless Order, a Power That Is Not, or anything similar thereto.

"You saw the end of this man Bouvais. He stumbled upon certain knowledge of that powerful Agent; he falsely laid claim to its powers and protection, and as a result he succeeded in many criminal schemes—as an inevitable result also he died the death decreed for all those who thus offend. Take notice and avoid his fate.

"The young man at your side has seen still more of the acts of this Power. He will tell you the danger is real, and he is neither coward nor fool."

He looked at Dan, who bowed soberly.

"It is real," said Dan.

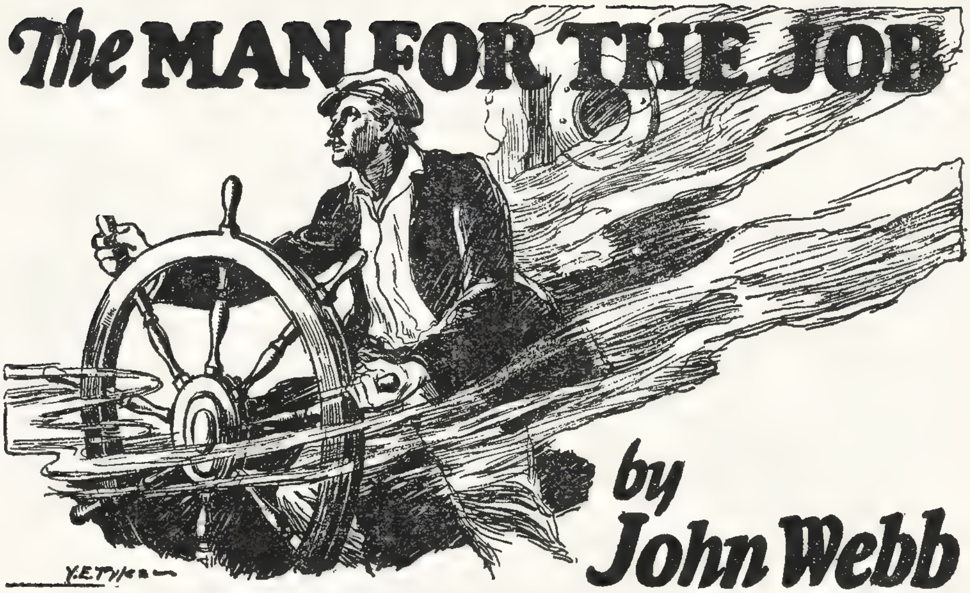
THERE was consternation in the house of VanSanvoord at the thought of Mary's marriage, then consent rather than the scandal of an elopement, also dismal prophecies for the future. The prophecies were not fulfilled. The few years of Mary's life as Mrs. Dan Wheeler, wife of the brilliant Wall Street operator, were years of poignant happiness. Her early death can be explained only by jealousy among the gods.

Of course Mac and Mrs. Mac were happy—as happy as they deserved to be, no doubt—and still are. McLeod is still member of the famous firm of architects, McLeod & Willing. Follows a quotation from a letter written by Mac in 1921:

> Have you seen anything since the Great War that looked like the work of a certain Power that has no name? Has it occurred to you that it may no longer exist—or that it has ceased to function, for it was said not to exist? I could not keep from thinking about it, and it seemed only common sense to assume that the Inner Circle or Heads of this all-powerful Order must be made up of the Great Powers, for they are the ones who would, rationally, profit by it. This theory has been strengthened by the apparent fact that Its work seems to have stopped now when so many of the great Governments have gone by the board.
>
> Has it occurred to you that the alarming shakiness of such Governments as are left may be due to the lack of this secret prop and stay? That the World of Law and Order, of Things Established, sways and totters because it misses this hidden but potent support?
>
> One other suggestion in this connection—that the document destroyed by a certain Secretary on an occasion we know of may have been related to this same secret. We have since learned of the secret meeting between two monarchs about that time—powerful monarchs whose thrones have since fallen—and there is an interesting corollary to be drawn. Certainly there would have been war if the fact had become known at that time—a war that might have rivaled that one just finished.
>
> These, as I say, are only suggestions.I should not have dared put them on paper four years ago. Probably you will burn this letter even now. I should.
>
> Yours, etc.,
> STUART MCLEOD.

But then "The McLeods always were kind o' queer."

THE END



The MAN FOR THE JOB

by John Webb

Author of "Going Home," "The Job," etc.

PRESIDENTS of steamship companies are smug, bespectacled men who sit in nice, warm offices and spend their time thinking and issuing orders which have no other purpose than to harass hard-working seamen. They know nothing of ships, nothing of the sea; they are stupid, and mean at heart.

Any seamen will swear that the above is the truth and nothing but the truth; but he'll not swear that it is *all* the truth—though he'll admit, if pressed, that there *may* be exceptions. One of the rights which they have not yet succeeded in taking from the seafarer is his right to growl; and he has chosen as his favorite topic the "useless skates that sit snug ashore and give orders." The worst of it is, the seamen are some times right.

Thomas V. Roetop became president of the Central American Steamship Company. He was a little man in a big job. He knew nothing of ships, nothing of the sea, he had never in his life taken a sea voyage except as a passenger in one or another of the guaranteed-not-to-roll floating hotels which unknowing folk call ships. He prided himself on being a go-getter and an efficiency man *par excellence.*

He was in reality a person of petty whims and notions; but Thomas V. Roetop did not know this; and he controlled enough of his company's stock to make his whims and notions into rules and regulations and pass them over the heads of his more efficient inferiors in office—one of whom was Abel Lawrence, "Rough-house" Lawrence, general manager with nearly two score years' experience in sail and steam.

Thomas V. Roetop had not been in office sixty days before he decided that the line was wofully lacking in "efficiency." He could not countenance that!

He sent for his general manager.

"Now, Mr. Lawrence," said he, as the old ex-shipmaster settled into the chair at the corner of the desk, "I've decided to make a few changes in the personnel of our ships. Our organization isn't up to the mark."

Old Lawrence sighed.

"You mean it isn't 'efficient,' " he said.

"Precisely. Now——"

"The dividends are high," commented Lawrence naively.

"Perhaps. But——"

"Perhaps? They are!" exploded old Lawrence. "We're paying as high dividends as——"

"As can be expected with the present organization," cut in Roetop irritably.

This old man grated on his nerves!

"I grant you that, Mr. Lawrence. I do not think they are so high that they can not be increased though."

Lawrence grunted.

Roetop took off his glasses and polished them deftly with a white silk handkerchief He replaced his glasses and sat with a sharp elbow on each arm of his chair and his scrawny fingers locked beneath his chin, then, in the tone of one who is explaining something to a mental inferior, he said—

"Mr. Lawrence, it has always been my belief that nothing is ever so nearly perfect that it can not be improved."

He paused as though waiting for his logic to reach its destination, then continued,

"The Central American Steamship organization can be improved—greatly. First, the deck-hands in our ships—the sailors: I don't like the appearance of the men you have been hiring."

"You don't like their looks?"

"You may put it that way."

"Huh! They weren't hired for their looks—they were hired to work."

"H'mm. Nevertheless, I don't like them. They are not the type of men I want in the ships. They are too tough, too—too hard-boiled. I understand that most of them are hard drinkers. They curse and fight. Men of that class, Mr. Lawrence, have no place in modern shipping. Besides, they are inveterate fault-finders."

"When a sailorman doesn't growl," said old Lawrence, "he's sick."

"H'mm. That was no doubt so—in your day."

Roetop sucked in his cheeks, pursed his lips and nodded sagely.

"But—that day is past."

"You're a——"

Old Lawrence checked himself, and, his lips pressed tightly, shook his head.

"That day is past," went on Roetop calmly. "Now, Mr. Lawrence, I want you to see that those men are weeded out, gradually, and replaced with men who will better advertise the line. A company is judged by its employes you know. I want alert young men who are clean and neat and sober——"

"Ribbon clerks!"

"Never mind. Please see that the order is carried out."

Roetop dismissed the subject with a wave of his hand.

"Now, about another matter. I understand that old Captain Parks, of the *Penguin*, intends to retire next year?"

Lawrence nodded.

"Who are you going to put in his place?"

"The chief mate of the *Penguin*," said Lawrence promptly.

"Ah! Why not give the position to one of the three freight-ship captains?"

"None of them want it. They say they are all satisfied where they are."

"Who is senior among them?"

"Captain McGuire, of the *Hawk*."

"He is the man they call 'One-Two Mac,' isn't he?"

"Yes."

"He is spoken of as a bully. Get rid of him."

"Of Capt'n Mac? Why——"

Lawrence's mouth opened in consternation.

"Why, Capt'n Mac's had the *Hawk* for twelve years!"

"No matter—let him go. Men whom we can't promote are of no use to us. I wouldn't allow that man to take command of a passenger-vessel, anyhow. He is sullen and ill-tempered——"

"Aw, that's only on the surface," said Lawrence. "When Johnny McGuire was fifteen years old, nearly thirty years ago, he and I sailed in the old Shenandoah together. When you get underneath his shell, you find he's as good a little man as ever lived."

"But passengers are not with the captain of a ship long enough to get 'under his shell.' I want refined, pleasant masters who can go around among the passengers and make them feel at home. Your Captain McGuire could not do that."

"No, he couldn't," admitted Lawrence reluctantly. "But why not leave him where he is, and promote the mate of the *Penguin?*"

"I don't believe in that," said Roetop, shaking his head. "I will never allow a Central American ship to be an officer's first command. It isn't safe."

"You mean that you don't believe in giving a man a chance? All masters have to begin somewhere."

"Let them begin in some other line then. This isn't a nautical school. You have three freight-ship captains, and not one of them is fit or willing to accept command of a passenger-vessel. You must let them go, and replace them with men whom we can promote. Start with Captain McGuire—his ship will be undergoing repairs for a month or so, and the new master will have time to familiarize himself with his command before going to sea. Now, I have just the man for the position——"

"I thought so," muttered Lawrence.

"What?"

"Go on—who's your man?"

"Captain Hayward. He has had command of several of the finest yachts on the Atlantic Coast. He is a good navigator, and a perfect gentleman—just the man to take the *Penguin* when Parks retires."

"Besides," said Lawrence, "he's your brother-in-law."

"That is nothing against him."

"Nor for him, either," said old Lawrence under his breath; and then aloud: "You know that Capt'n Mac owns a thirty-second interest in the *Hawk?*"

Roetop smiled.

"I do. I have looked it up, and I find that his contract as master of the *Hawk* expired two years ago. He will still own his thirty-second interest and will draw dividends on it, but he will no longer be master."

"I think Capt'n Mac will be kind of cut up over this," said Lawrence slowly. "He thinks a lot of that old wagon of his. To be frank with you, I think you're playing him a dirty trick."

"Tut. We can not allow personal feelings to interfere with the efficiency of——"

"Efficiency!" growled Lawrence. "Look here, Mr. Roetop, I don't like this at all. It's rotten! You won't give a trustworthy mate a chance to make good, and you're firing the best shipmaster in the line. Besides being mean, it's poor business. A year of this and we'll not have an officer or man in the line that we can depend on."

"I'll accept the responsibility," said Roetop with a pitying smile.

"You'll do the firing, too, then," said Lawrence, rising. "I'll send Capt'n Mac to you."

He clamped his heavy jaws and swung about toward the door.

"Do so, by all means," said Roetop coolly, and he turned to his desk.

ONE-TWO MAC—Captain McGuire of the freighter *Hawk*—entered the down-town office building in which were the offices of the Central American Steamship Company. He went first to the general manager's office, on the main floor.

"What's up, Abe?" he asked as he entered, behind him a trail of smoke from his hand-made cigaret. "What does the boss want with me?"

Lawrence shook his head.

"I'm not saying a word, Mac, Roetop will give you the bad news."

"Bad news?"

"Yep."

He twined thick fingers in wiry gray hair, and tugged as though he would pull it out by the roots.

"I'd give a thousand dollars to have 'im in the fo'c'sle of a deep-water ship for ten minutes. He's a louse!"

Captain Mac drew up one corner of his mouth in a queer smile. He was a slender man, and below medium height. His hair was black, tinged at the temples with gray, and his eyes were black and coldly metallic. His nose was thin, hawk-like and aggressive, and his mouth was thin and straight. He was a cold, hard, stern little man, One-Two Mac, and he looked it. His manner was coolly pugnacious.

"Go on up to 'im," said Lawrence, pushing the little shipmaster toward the door. "And say—if you think he needs a clout in the lug, let me know, and I'll hold the door against all comers while you turn to on 'im."

"Rats," said Captain Mac.

He left Lawrence's office and took the elevator to the third floor, then he made his way to the anteroom outside the president's office.

"I want to see Mr. Roetop," he said to the wasp-waisted young dandy who was bent over a ledger behind the high railing.

"In a minute," murmured the young dandy without looking up.

Captain Mac ground his cigaret beneath his heel, strolled the length of the room, and returned to the railing.

"Does this thing open," he asked in a low voice, "or do I have to climb over it?"

"One minute," said the youth, smoothing back his sleek blond hair, his eyes still on the book before him.

Captain Mac put one long arm through the railing, clutched the youth by the hair, and dragged him from the chair.

"Open that gate," he snapped.

The youth, who was the president's secretary, opened the gate and stepped back to allow the captain to enter.

"I'll report this to my father, Mr. Roetop," he blurted angrily.

The captain went on by, knocked sharply at Roetop's door, and entered.

Captain Mac came out of the president's office five minutes later. His black eyes were colder and more metallic than ever; his thin nostrils were quivering and his mouth was set in a one-sided smile.

Young Roetop smiled to himself as the captain went out through the opening in the railing.

"Good riddance," he told himself. "That's number one—it won't take the old man long to clean out the rest of these nineteenth century relics. He'll make this line over in no time."

Old Lawrence caught Captain Mac as he left the elevator.

"Fired," said the captain shortly.

"Know it," said Lawrence. "It's a dirty shame."

"Oh, I don't care," said the captain, a queer break in his voice.

"You're a liar," said Lawrence.

He smacked one fist into the palm of his other hand.

"I'd like to bust him on the lug!" he growled.

"Rats."

"I would. One thing I'm going to do! I'm going to look up the directors and see if I can't gather enough proxies to muzzle that mutt. I'm not going to stand by and see 'im take the *Hawk* away from you."

"You mind your own business," snapped Captain Mac.

"It's a shame."

"What do you care—you haven't been fired, have you?"

Lawrence smiled grimly.

"Not yet."

"Well, mind your own business then."

Lawrence grasped the little man by the lapels of his coat and shook him.

"You're a little sorehead. You're sore because you lost your job."

"I'm not," said Captain Mac, and he twisted free and swung off toward the door.

"Sorehead," called Lawrence after him.

"Go to ——," answered the captain.

He crossed the East River by ferry, then took a street car to the Brooklyn shipyard wherein the *Hawk* was undergoing repairs.

The early Winter dusk was settling down as he made his way through the yard. The air was cold and he turned up his coat-collar and pulled down the brim of his soft black hat. Arriving at the *Hawk's* berth, he stood for a while with his glance roaming over the vessel which was no longer his.

The *Hawk* was not the usual slab-sided, thick-waisted freight-ship. She was long and lean and narrow, and had once been the pride of a company which had boasted the fastest freighters on the north Atlantic. She was old and worn, rusty and weather-beaten, fast nearing the end of her usefulness.

"She's like me," mused the little captain, and his smile became more one-sided.

He went aboard and to his room, and sent the quartermaster for the chief mate and the chief engineer.

Mr. Tenny, the mate, a lean, dried-up State-o'-Mainer, came to the captain's room a moment before the chief engineer, a big, heavy-handed man with a great roaring voice.

"Gentlemen," said Captain Mac slowly, "I want to thank you both for the assistance you have given me during the years we have been together. I am leaving the *Hawk* tomorrow. That's all."

Tenny, his jaw hanging, blinked his watery old eyes at the captain.

"What's that?" barked Anderson, the chief engineer.

"The new master will be aboard tomorrow," said the little captain.

Anderson doubled his fists and glowered.

"What d'you mean by quittin' like this—without—without tellin' us——"

He lost control of himself, and shook his fist in the captain's face.

"What d'you mean by it, you—you——"

"Wal—goldern—" spluttered Tenny—"after all the time we been together, now, seems like you might 'a' told us you was goin' to quit."

"I didn't quit," said the captain. "I was fired."

"Fired!" exclaimed Anderson. "What for?"

Captain Mac calmly, almost indifferently, explained Roetop's ideas and intentions to them. No one who did not know him would have taken this placid little man for the fighting bucko who had hammered his way to fame as the toughest and squarest of shipmasters.

"Why, —— it!" exploded Anderson when the captain finished, "we won't let the —— get away with that! We'll strike. We'll take every mate and master and engineer in the line ashore. We'll tie up every ship! We'll——"

"We'll set every dang ship adrift in the harbor," spluttered Tenny. "We'll cut the Central American ships adrift from the piers and let 'em go down the river——"

"Rats!" said the captain. "You'll stick to your jobs like good seamen—till you're fired."

He rolled a cigaret with his long strong fingers and applied a match to it.

"There'll be a new crew of sailors coming aboard before you leave the yard, Mr. Tenny. They will be nice boys, I'm told, and will cause you no trouble."

"They won't be sailors, then," said Tenny.

"They're coming, anyhow."

"Jest after I been collectin' a crew o' real sailors, too," said Tenny mournfully, shaking his head.

He stepped to the captain and put out his hand.

"Goldern it; I'm sorry to see you go, cap'n. We didn't get along so well, maybe, but—but——"

"That's why we don't want to see 'im go, you fool," said Anderson. "Who we goin' to scrap with now? How we goin' to blow off steam on some lollypop that'll report us to the office every time we give 'im a bit o' lip? I know these yacht-willies. They walk around with a gun in their pocket, and yell for the police every time a sailor makes a face at 'em."

CAPTAIN HAYWARD smiled at the *Hawk*. He was a big blond man, fleshy and soft, but handsome and with an authoritive manner. He was politely domineering.

"She isn't a command to boast of, is she?" he remarked to Captain Mac after he had introduced himself the next morning.

"She's a fine little ship," answered the captain stoutly. "She's handy, and wise—tell her where you want to go and she'll take you there."

Captain Hayward laughed loudly.

"You old-timers seem to have a lot of faith in some of these worn-out old tubs," he said. "This thing ought to be scrapped, or thrown in the boneyard."

"She is a good little ship," insisted Captain Mac softly.

"Good seamen don't sneer at old ships," bluntly cut in Anderson, who, with Mr. Tenny, was standing near.

Hayward's laugh rang out louder than before.

"Nonsense," he said.

His glance took in Anderson and Tenny, and he nodded to himself.

"Two more candidates for the boneyard," he thought.

Two stewards went by with Captain Mac's trunk.

"Well, I'll be going," Captain Mac said, and started for the ladder that led from the bridge down to the main deck.

He paused at the top of the ladder, turned and came back to them.

"The standard compass, Captain Hayward—I've ordered new magnets for it——"

"I'll see that it's put in order," answered Hayward, smiling faintly.

"You'll find that when the booms are lowered the deviation increases considerably."

"I'll watch it."

"And the wheel-ropes need setting up——"

"I'll see that it is done, Captain McGuire."

Little One-Two Mac started again toward the ladder, and again paused.

"And the forward bitts, on the starboard side ——"

"Oh, don't worry, captain," said Hayward impatiently; "I'll look the old wreck over well before I take her to sea. Good-by."

"Old woman," he murmurred, turning away.

His words carried to Anderson, and the latter's eyes blazed.

"He's a better man than you," he growled.

"Are you sure of that?" asked Hayward, boldly advancing a pace.

"I'm positive of it," said Anderson, advancing to meet him. "He's a better man than you are—and so am I. We know enough to respect an old ship. Only fools—and yacht chauffeurs—sneer at things they don't understand."

"You forget yourself, Mr. Anderson," said Hayward, his face crimson. "If Mr. Roetop should hear of this——"

"He will—because you'll tell him. Your reputation came ahead of you, you see."

Anderson turned his back upon Hayward and went down the ladder with Tenny.

Now and then, as he walked along the pier away from the *Hawk*, Captain Mac turned and looked back. When a man has been twelve years in a ship, he doesn't leave that ship with a light heart, particularly a man who, like Captain Mac, has no home or family. It was *his* ship. He knew every line of her, every whim. He knew how she acted in a seaway, how she lay best in a blow, how quickly she answered her helm and how long it took her to pick up steerage-way from a full stop.

How many hours he had paced to and fro on that worn old bridge! He knew every bolt in it, every plank, how many strides it was from one wing to the other. He knew the feel of the ship in blow and calm, when she was making good weather of it and when she was laboring.

And so the little man looked back, and shook his head—and told himself that he didn't care, that in no time he would have command of a fine big ship in another line. He noticed that a tug, working its way through the closely packed ships and barges in the slip, was carelessly scraping yards of paint from the *Hawk's* side, and he opened his mouth to shout.

"Hello, little man," said a friendly voice at his elbow, and he turned to confront the shipyard superintendent, a man wise in the ways of seamen.

"I heard about it," said the superintendent. "That Roetop is a punk. Too bad. I suppose you'll be looking for a ship?"

"Oh, no hurry about that," said the captain. "I'm going to rest up for a while."

"Well, when you're ready to go to sea again, let me know. I stand in good with the Interoceanic people, you know, and I'll bet I can get you a ship that will make the *Hawk* look like a Prospect Park swan-boat in comparison. They're looking for men like you."

"Thanks, Fosdick. But, no hurry, no hurry."

"Whenever you're ready. Come down and see me once in a while."

"I will. Thanks."

Captain Mac glanced once more at the *Hawk*, then strode off toward the gate.

FINANCIALLY Captain Mac had nothing to worry about; he had a steady income from property which he had bought with the money his investment in the *Hawk* had returned him; then, too, he would still receive a hundred dollars or so a month from the investment itself. So he had nothing to worry about—and yet he worried.

He found himself watching the weather from his hotel window. One night he awoke from a sound sleep, to find that a storm had come up. The window panes were streaming water and a stiff wind was whistling around the corners of the building. He wondered how the *Hawk* was faring in the shipyard, if the dock-lines were holding. He knew that she had a habit of surging back and forth along the pier, particularly when she was light, and high in the water, in a way that was trying on dock-lines that were rather the worse for wear.

He wondered if Mr. Tenny was aboard, and, if not, if he had thought to put out mooring-wire forward and aft, or if the mate who happened to be aboard would think to do it. Was the bosun aboard? Were there men enough aboard to handle eight-inch Manila-lines should she threaten to break away from the pier? Somehow it never occurred to him to wonder if Captain Hayward was aboard.

The next morning he telephoned the shipyard.

"Any trouble last night?" he asked. "Did any ships break away?"

"No," answered a voice.

"No trouble at all?"

"None at all. Who is this, please."

"Oh—it doesn't matter. I just thought perhaps something might have happened to some of the ships."

"No, nothing happened. Good-by."

Captain Mac, for some reason, felt greatly relieved. He came out of the telephone-booth and walked briskly away, smiling. And then, as he walked, his stride became less brisk and his smile became thin and one-sided. What was the blooming old tub to him? What a fool he was!

He wandered down to the Battery, and stood on the jetty in the bitter wind that swept in from the harbor. He watched the ships going up the North River from Quarantine. There was an old tramp that looked like the *Hawk*—no, she was too broad, and her lines weren't so neat. And that other one was too high in the water—top-heavy, he'd bet. The *Hawk* wasn't top-heavy.

He remembered that today was the day when the *Hawk* was to leave the shipyard and go to her pier in the North River. Perhaps he would be able to see her when she came over from Brooklyn and rounded the Battery. But what sense was there in that, in standing in the cold to watch a dirty little tramp go by? But still—well, he'd wait.

He looked at his watch: ten o'clock. The *Hawk* was to leave the shipyard at twelve. Over two hours to wait. Too long. Perhaps—perhaps it would be better to go over to Brooklyn and see the tugs pull her out. Yes—he thought he would.

He boarded a ferry-boat and mounted to the upper deck, where he stood looking out over the harbor. In appearance he was a cold, stern, forbidding figure; in reality he was a lonely, homeless little man.

"Extry! Big fire in Brooklyn!" shrieked a voice in his ear, and he found himself staring at a newspaper which a boy thrust before his eyes.

LANG'S SHIPYARD ABLAZE!
Fire Not Yet Under Control

Captain Mac snatched the paper and handed the boy a coin.

Lang's shipyard! Why, the *Hawk* was in Lang's shipyard!

Captain Mac read that an oil-tanker had exploded in the yard at about seven o'clock that morning—shortly after he had telephoned. The oil from the tanker, and the wind, had spread the fire so quickly that the firemen had been unable to control it. Tugs were busy hauling out the vessels that had not yet been burned.

Off toward South Brooklyn he could see clouds of black smoke hanging over the waterfront. He went below and advanced to the forward end of the ferry-boat.

Captain Mac bolted from the boat the moment it bumped into its slip and the gate was opened. In the street, he looked about for a taxicab, saw one and ran toward it.

"Lang's Shipyard—" he called to the driver as he leaped in—"and in a hurry!"

The taxi jumped ahead.

Ten minutes later the taxi came to an abrupt stop.

"Fire-lines, boss," said the driver. "Can't go any farther."

Captain Mac paid the man and went to the uniformed policeman who stood in the middle of the street for the purpose of turning back vehicles.

"I'M MASTER of one of the ships in the yard, officer," he said, and he held out an old envelope with his and the ship's name upon it. "I have to get there in a hurry."

"All right, cap," said the policeman, nodding.

Farther along the captain came to a line of policemen stretched across the street, and passed them in the same manner. The gateman at the shipyard recognized him and passed him in with a nod.

The yard was chaos, as in fact the entire neighborhood was for blocks about. Lines of hose lay in every direction. Fire-engines were pumping and fire apparatus filled the yard from the gate down to the docks. Slush and ice and cinders were inches deep underfoot. Firemen, grimy and tired, were everywhere, fighting hard and determinedly to check the fire but slowly being driven toward the southern end of the yard, toward Pier 6.

"Where's the *Hawk?*" Captain Mac asked a yard workman. "Has she been moved?"

"Naw. She's still at Pier 6," answered the man. "They're pulling out the big ships first."

Captain Mac ran down the yard toward Pier 6.

At the shore end of the pier a half-score of unusually rough-looking seamen sat upon the string-piece, near them their sea-bags. A short, squat, red-faced man, who stood with his feet wide apart, was gazing moodily out along the pier.

"What's up, bosun?" asked Captain Mac.

The red-faced man touched his cap visor in a half-salute.

"'Ow d'yo' do, cap'n," he said in a high-pitched cockney voice. "We got sacked—th' lot of us. Cap'n 'Ayward, the ——, beggin' yer pardon, sir, give us lads th' sack. He brung a gang o' lydies' mydes aboard to tyke our plyces. We're wytin' roun' to see th' —— 'ooker burn to th' water, sir."

"You lime-juice swab," said the captain. "If you were any good you'd be standing by to help 'em get her away from the dock."

The cockney shook his head.

"Not fer Cap'n 'Ayward we won't. We would fer you, though," he added.

"Why don't Captain Hayward take her out under her own power?" asked the captain. "What is he waiting for?"

"'E says 'e don't wanta tyke a chance without tugs, sir. Besides, Mr. Handerson is 'avin' trouble with 'is blooming engine. I'm a-thinkin' we on'y 'ave to wyte 'arf an hour to see th' 'ooker burn. See 'ow th' fire is comin' 'long down th' wind, sir?"

The cockney was right; the fire was coming fast. Pier 5 was ablaze and the barges in the slip were carrying the flames across to the pier at which the *Hawk* was moored. Pier 6 was fast getting too warm for comfort. Two tugs were struggling with a string of barges in the slip and two fire-boats were pouring tons of water on the flaming pier.

The firemen had run out additional sections of hose and were trying to prevent the fire leaping the ship; which they would have a good chance of doing if the tugs could clear out the barges before the fire was carried across by them. Three tugs had got hold of a huge sulfur-ship that was moored ahead of the *Hawk* and were trying to swing her head toward the opening in the breakwater.

On the bridge of the *Hawk*, Captain Hayward, an imposing, self-confident figure, was pacing to and fro. Fosdick, the yard superintendent, came running along the pier, and shouted:

"Can you go out under your own power, Captain Hayward? I can't spare you any tugs for a while."

Hayward threw up both hands.

"I need tugs," he answered. "I've got no power yet, anyway."

Fosdick shook his head, and turned to Captain Mac.

"Is your thirty-second interest in the *Hawk* insured?" he asked.

"What—oh, yes, it's insured," answered the captain.

"I think you're going to collect it," said Fosdick grimly.

The engine of a motor-boat that had been lying beside the pier suddenly began to splutter; and the man in the boat stood up and called to the cockney boatswain:

"If youse guys are comin' out with me, come on. It's gettin' too warm for me here."

"We're not goin' yet, myte," answered the cockney, "but yer can tyke our bags to th' Seamen's Institute." And then, to his men, "chuck in yer bags, lads."

The men threw in their bags and the motor-boat headed toward the breakwater.

"We wants to stye and see th' fun," explained the boatswain to Captain Mac.

The tugs were having trouble with the sulfur-ship. She was high in the water, and the pressure of the wind on her sides was too much for the tugs to overcome. Their whistles were shrieking for help. The string of barges was nearly clear when the sulfur-ship swung across the slip, completely blocking it, and nipping off the last barge of the string. This barge, blazing merrily, swung down on Pier 6.

"Now we'll 'ave it!" exclaimed the cockney. "The —— pier is soaked with oil. Watch it go!"

Firemen were all about them now, and the cockney and his men turned to and helped them run their lines of hose along Pier 6. In spite of the boatswain's declaration they wanted to see the *Hawk* burn, he and his men worked with a will to prevent such a thing happening.

THE fire on Pier 6 was well under way now; the far end of the pier was blazing and the flames were licking the paint from the *Hawk's* on-shore side. The firemen were retreating with their hose, slowly and doggedly, but retreating, nevertheless. One of the fire tugs left Pier 5 and trained its streams on Pier 6.

Hayward had his fire hose going and was wetting down the pier near the ship and the ship itself. The sulphur-ship, jammed tightly across the slip, blocking the exit, was blazing fiercely forward and aft, and the fumes of the burning sulphur filled the air to leeward of her.

"Can't you get your vessel out o' there, captain?" a grimy fire-captain shouted to Hayward.

Hayward shook his head and threw up his arms.

"No power, no tugs, and the slip is blocked. I'll have to take my men ashore in a minute."

"What ever you're going to do, you'd better do it quick," said the fireman.

Five tugs now had lines to the burning sulphur-ship, and it seemed as if they might be able to haul her out of the slip and start her toward the breakwater, but it appeared unlikely that they would be able to do so in time to save the *Hawk*.

Hayward's seamen, all young, inexperienced-looking men, were already on the pier, and Hayward himself was preparing to follow them. A suit-case in one hand, his cased sextant in the other, the ship's log-book under his arm, he came down from the bridge and hurried aft to the engine-room doorway, where he put in his head and called to some one below. He put down his suit-case and entered the doorway, came out again, and then walked to the rail and looked overside at the flames licking the side of the ship.

"If you don't hurry," called the fire-chief, "you'll not be able to get off at all."

Hayward leaped to the engine-room door, and again called down.

"The engineer won't come up or let his men come up," he cried to the fireman, coming again to the rail.

A tongue of flame swirled upward toward Hayward, and he started back, then caught up his suit-case and ran forward to the gangway. Burning embers fell from the top of the pier-shed and set his clothes afire, and, dropping his suit-case, he beat out the flames as he ran. He paused for a moment at the top of the gangway, looked back toward the engine-room, then, with one arm thrown up to protect his face from the flames, he leaped down the gangway and came running along the pier.

"They wouldn't come!" he panted, "they wouldn't come!"

Anderson, black with grease and grime from his engines, appeared on the poop of the *Hawk*.

"All right," he bellowed. "I can give ye power now. Are you goin' to take her out?"

"It's too late," cried Hayward.

Captain Mac caught Hayward by the arm and pushed him toward the ship.

"Go on," he said, "run your ship out o' this."

"It's too late, you fool," panted Hayward, "it's too late. Besides, the slip is blocked, and they won't give me any tugs. I can't swing her without tugs." And then to Anderson, "Come off—come off!—before it's too late!"

"Are ye goin' to take her out?" bellowed Anderson again.

"I tell you it's too——"

"Go to —— then, you mucker. Take your willie-boys home and put 'em to bed. I'll take her out myself. Let go my after lines."

"It's murder!" screamed Hayward. "Come off!"

"Go to ——!" answered Anderson; and then, to the men on the pier: "Let go my after-lines—I'll cut the for'rd ones with an ax."

The cockney boatswain, his crew of villainous-looking seamen in his wake, came up and cocked one red-rimmed eye at Captain Mac.

"Hi thinks, sir, as 'ow it *ayn't* too lyte," he said grinning with lips black with smoke.

He jerked his head toward his men, and, watching the captain anxiously, waited.

"Neither do I, bose," snapped Captain Mac, and he sprang forward. "Come on, bose!"

With his hat-brim pulled down and the collar of his greatcoat turned up to protect his face, he sprinted for the gangway, and close on his heels came the cockney boatswain and his hard-bitten veterans.

"Let 'em go," grunted the fire-captain to his men. "They're *seamen!* I know the breed."

With the somber little shipmaster in the lead, they raced along the blazing pier to the ship's gangway, and scrambled up the gangway to the deck, where, like the perfectly-trained seamen they were, they ran to their stations.

A blazing timber fell from the pier-shed and knocked the cockney sprawling. A two-hundred-and-forty-pound Dane, who had been following at the cockney's heels, picked him up bodily and staggered forward with him.

"Let me down, Larkin, ye big cow," cried the boatswain, planting his fist on the big man's jaw. "D'yer think I'm a bloomin' byeby?"

The Swede, laughing, set him down.

Captain Mac went directly to the bridge, where he twirled the wheel to see if the steam had been turned on the steering-gear. Mr. Tenny, who had been in the engine-room with the chief engineer, came to the bridge with his coat wrapped about his head and went to the engine-room telegraph.

Captain Mac was himself now. He was a born shipmaster handling his vessel. This was the one thing in the world he knew how to do to perfection. His greatcoat was afire in a half-dozen places, but, even as he beat out the flames, he was giving orders:

"Let go aft. Cut the forward lines, bose, but hold the wire—I'm going to warp around the corner of the dock with it. Full ahead, Mr. Tenny. I'm going to ram that sulphur-boat, bosun—take your men off the fo'c'sle-head and watch out for flying timbers!"

He put the helm amidship as he felt the little old tramp throb to the churn of the propeller.

The *Hawk* began to surge ahead, slowly at first, but gathering headway with every pound of Anderson's beloved engine. The sulfur-ship was a hundred yards ahead of the *Hawk*. The wire hawser that Captain Mac intended using as a spring-line to warp around the end of the pier stretched out fifty or sixty yards ahead, so that the *Hawk* would strike the sulphur-ship before it became taut and checked her speed.

"Hook her up," called the little captain down the voice-tube to the engine-room. "Give me all the power you have!"

"Tend your bridge, and you'll have enough to do," growled Anderson in answer; but even as he spoke he was opening the throttle to give his "mill" more steam.

The *Hawk*, being light, and a fast starting ship at any time, was now going ahead at a good clip. The huge sulfur-ship loomed high over the bow.

"Hang on!" cried Captain Mac, and he dropped to the deck and wrapped both arms about the base of the binnacle.

There was a terrific crash, the rending of timbers, the screech of ripping plates, and the *Hawk's* bow lifted high in the air; then she settled again and plunged on. The sulphur-ship had been knocked completely out of the opening by the weight and impact of the little freighter.

"Stop," called the captain; and Mr. Tenny picked himself up from where he had been thrown in the wing of the bridge and put the telegraph on STOP. The throbbing of the propeller ceased. The *Hawk* brought up on the wire spring-line and warped slowly around the pier end until she was headed toward the opening in the breakwater. Then the boatswain and his men cast the wire off the bitts and let it go over the side on the run.

The boatswain stood in the forward waist and grinned up at the captain.

"We ayn't got no bloomin' bow at all, sir," he said. "All we got for'rd is a 'ole."

"Stow the jaw tackle," retorted Captain Mac. "Have an eight-inch line ready to run out to that tug."

"Aye, sir," answered the cockney, grinning happily, and he turned to direct his men.

TWO hours later the *Hawk* came to rest in a dry-dock in another shipyard. Another hour and the water was pumped out of the dock and several visitors came aboard, the first of whom was "Rough-house" Lawrence. He found Captain Mac working away with wrench and screw-driver at the steering gear on the bridge.

"Here, what the —— do you mean by taking another man's ship apart?" demanded Lawrence.

The little man dropped his tools and stood erect. Half the crown of his hat was burnt out, his greatcoat was ruined beyond repair, his eyebrows and lashes were gone, and there was a sunburst of plaster on one cheek and another upon the back of one hand. His hands and face glistened with grease that he had rubbed on to take out the sting of his burns.

"Eh—what do you mean by it?" insisted Lawrence.

"Oh—I thought I might as well kind of fix things up while I was waiting—aw, go to ——!" he finished, seeing the twinkle in the other's eye.

"Never mind, you little sorehead," said Lawrence, pounding the captain on the back. "I've got good news for you."

"Huh?"

Captain Mac looked hopefully at him.

"Yep. Remember I said I was going to look up the stockholders? Well, I did; and I got good results. You know Roetop controlled enough votes to run things about as he pleased—but now he doesn't. I came out flat-footed and told the stockholders what I thought of things, and they voted that I was to have complete control of the line's ship personnel. So, from now on, *I'm* your boss."

The little captain snorted.

"You'll keep the *Hawk*," continued Lawrence, "and we'll fix her up in first-class shape for you."

"How about my sailors?"

"Suit yourself. If you like this gang of hoodlums, dog-stealers, and cut-throats that you have, why—keep 'em."

"They're all good men," said Captain Mac.

"Yeah—if they had their deserts, they would all be in jail."

"Rats!"

Lawrence caught the captain's hand and pumped it up and down.

"Listen, you little grouch," he said, "I haven't told you what I think of this stunt you pulled off with the *Hawk*——"

"And you're not going to," said the captain, jerking his hand away. "Go on, now, let me alone."

"I think——"

"Go on—beat it." And then, in a low voice: "Much obliged, Abel, for fixing things up——"

"'S all right," said Lawrence, turning to go down the ladder. "'S all right."

Captain Mac looked forward, then aft, then aloft. He absently picked up a canvas cover and placed it carefully over the engine-room telegraph to protect the instrument from the weather. He closed the chart-room door and ran his hand thoughtfully over the scorched paint on the side of the house. He went to the engine-room voice-tube and called, after placing his finger on the buzzer for a moment:

"Did you get shaken up much below? Any damage?"

"Not much," bellowed a voice. "And no fault o' yours that we weren't smashed to ——! Tend your bridge!"

His black eyes glistening, a faint smile upon his hard mouth, the little man picked up his tools and went to work on the binnacle.

Abel Lawrence, who had been standing upon the ladder with his eyes barely topping the bridge-deck, went down, treading softly and grinning.

A brisk young man came along the main deck and started to mount the ladder to the bridge.

"Here—where are you going?" asked Lawrence, catching the young man by the arm.

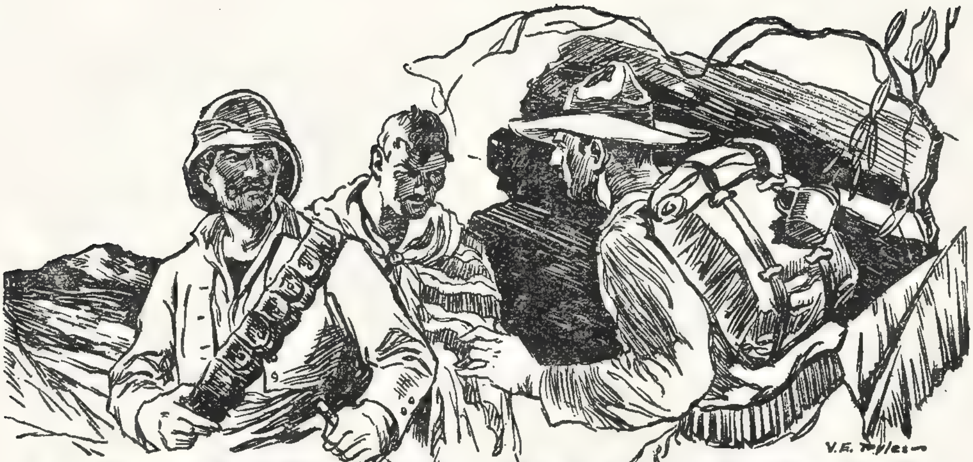
"I'm from the ship underwriters," explained the young man quickly. "I want to get the particulars of this affair."

"Get 'em later," said Lawrence, "the captain's busy now."

"But I want to give him some good news too. Nothing sure about it yet, of course, but Captain McGuire has saved the underwriters a considerable sum, and I feel certain that they'll show their appreciation in a substantial way. He and his men went a bit beyond the ordinary 'line of duty,' I understand. It'll be good news——"

Lawrence drew the man down the ladder.

"Let Captain Mac alone for a while," he said. "He's had about all the good news that he can stand. Besides, he's having a —— of a lot of fun with a screw-driver and a monkey-wrench, so let 'im alone. Come with me, and I'll tell you about it."



A PARTNER FOR GOGO

by Clyde B. Hough

Author of "One of Life's Guardians," "The Spirit of the Flames," etc.

IT IS, to say the least, odd that the trails of "Black Heart" and Ralston had not crossed or come together sooner—sooner than they did. For both men, though following widely different pursuits, had operated more than two years in the same locality—from the peaks to the foot-hills of Mount Amuyao in northern Luzon.

Black Heart was a Filipino *ladrone*. His game was robbing and looting. His fearsome name had been given him in consequence of much cold-blooded cruelty. And he had so often slipped through the nets of both soldiers and constabulary that the mere mention of him had become at once a reproach and a challenge to every uniformed man in the district.

On the other hand Ralston was decent and straight-dealing, one of a very small class of white men who really fit—belong—in the tropics. He had served in the army during the Philippine insurrection and, at the end of that fray, had remained in the islands by preference. Since then he had followed the lure of the yellow magnet. He sought gold in creek-beds and elbows left dry by shifting streams.

Strictly speaking, however, Black Heart the *ladrone* covered more territory than did Ralston the prospector. For the *ladrone's* most lucrative activities were carried on among the small villages just below and beyond the last mountain-spurs, while the prospector applied his efforts entirely to the narrower confines of the higher region. At any rate such had been the case. But of late Ralston had been singularly unlucky in the Mount Amuyao country and now he was leaving this section, or so he thought, to try his fortune in some more propitious part of the islands—perhaps in some other line of endeavor. Still he had no exact destination and no definite purpose in mind. To use his own words he was—

"Wide open to any honest proposition with a kick in it."

Ralston drained the last swallow of black coffee from his tin cup, rolled a cigaret, lighted it and stood up. He was a big man but didn't look it. He had height—six feet of it—and his arms, like his legs, were long and large. The deception was in his shoulders. They were no wider than his waist from flank to flank. But his chest was deep and his shoulder blades bulged with muscles, almost to the extent of a hump.

He stamped out the remaining embers of the fire on which he had cooked his breakfast and began making up his pack.

The sun was just beginning to color the eastern sky. Here and there bald lava peaks that had been dun and drab in the gray dawn caught the pink sun rays and shed their drabness as if the hand of an artist had suddenly shingled them with pigments of purple and henna and gold.

Ralston swung the finished pack up to his humped, narrow shoulders and with a long effortless stride headed downward and westward toward Balak, the largest village in the foot-hills. The trail he followed struggled through dense patches of twisted ironwoods, descended deep ravines, wound up long lava-slopes and over mountain-ridges, but always the general progress was downward.

It was a wild, almost inaccessible country, a very labyrinth of unexpected fissures, dried up lava-pits and foliage-hidden caverns. There was, indeed, small wonder that Black Heart forever eluded his pursuers once he gained these mountains.

Mid-afternoon found the sun facing Ralston from the west and driving shafts of heat straight at his deep chest. His blue cambric shirt was streaked and smelly with sweat. The ridges of the foot-hills grew narrow and low. The ravines widened into valleys and the valleys were dotted with bamboo huts—native farm homes—their thatched roofs drooping like Wintertime hay-stacks. Rich valleys these, covered with waving green cane and yellow rice ready for the scythe.

The insurrection was now four years in the past. Native farmers were flourishing under the new government; and Black Heart prospered accordingly.

Ralston came to the edge of a precipice and saw Balak sprawled out below. He slipped his pack and sat down to rest and smoke before making the descent into town. He was very soon aware of an unusual silence in the place—an entire absence of human voices. And more than this: there was not a human being in sight. He lost interest in his cigaret and threw it away, half-smoked. He swung his pack up to his humped, narrow shoulders, scrambled down the cliff and made toward the center of Balak.

It was certain that the inhabitants had been there as lately as the noontime meal, for the smell of recent cooking and the odor of burnt wood came up strong and fresh to Ralston. Once he passed a lone *carabao* wallowing in a dirty water-hole by an ancient well. But there was no sight or sound of humans. Only dogs, chickens and a few mangy hogs lay about in the shade of thatched huts and panted in the hot dust.

Ralston stopped and listened intently. No voices. He moved on and came into a street of shops. The shops were all open. Some of them had been broken open and all of them had been looted. Goods and wares of many sorts lay about, spilled and smashed in utter confusion and ruin. Ralston looked along the empty street to the end of it and saw Balak's one adobe building—the Catholic church with red-tiled roof, high narrow windows and broad double doors.

The doors were closed. Ralston walked toward the church and soon heard the dull drone of native voices. He quickened his pace and arrived before the closed doors. They were barred from the outside by two heavy poles nailed to the door-facings with large spikes. The droning voices were now plain—inside the church. Examination proved that all the windows, like the doors, were effectively barred.

"How is it," Ralston called loudly in the native tongue, "that I find the people of Balak boxed up in their own church?"

There was a series of glad exclamations from the Filipinos and shouts of:

"*Viva el Americano!*"

They had recognized his Yankee voice even in Tagal words.

And then one of them answered the white man's question.

"We have been visited by a fiend, *señor*—that fiend whom men call Black Heart; and I pray you, *señor*, let us out."

Ralston slapped his thigh and laughed uproariously. He was giving Black Heart due credit for a neat trick; and he was also enjoying the parley.

"Who is it that prays so hard to be let out of his church?" chuckled Ralston.

"'Tis Carlos Campango, *señor*, the *presidente* of Balak."

"Serves you right, Carlos. But why did Black Heart corral you and your crowd in the church and leave you so?"

"So that none might pursue him while he made away with our goods and our money."

Ralston found an ax and chopped away the poles that barred the church doors. The Filipinos rushed out in a chattering, milling stream. They hurried to their homes and shops, anxious to learn the extent of their losses. Investigation showed that no homes had been looted, except for cash. They had all been searched for that, of course.

Carlos Campango turned out to be the heaviest loser from the raid, for his was the largest shop in Balak. The *presidente* stood in the middle of his looted shop, cursing and lamenting his losses.

"Stop your whining," snapped Ralston, "and do something. You are head man here."

"Do what, *señor?* It is useless for us to follow the Black Heart. We are not sufficiently armed to battle with his *ladrones*, even if we could overtake him."

"How many followers has he got, anyway?"

"We do not know, *señor*. They came into Balak mounted on ponies, shooting and yelling like fiends. Some of them dismounted and went through the streets driving every one out of the houses and shops, while others remained mounted, flourishing their weapons and herding the people into the church where they searched every man, woman and child for money. And all this time there were scattering shots and fierce yells from unseen *ladrones* stationed in the bushes on the hillsides. So we know that Black Heart has many men but we do not know how many."

"You were right, Carlos," Ralston admitted. "You and your people couldn't fight that outfit. But you can send for the soldiers."

"I have, *señor*. Already I have sent word to the *Americano* soldiers at Vigan and to the native constabulary at Bontoc. But it is a day's journey to either place."

"Yes," agreed Ralston, "a day for your messenger and a day for the boys to get here. That will make Black Heart two good days ahead of them—lost in the mountains."

The white man walked to the door of the shop and stood looking up at the mountains. After a few minutes he turned and went back to the native.

"Carlos," he said, "when I came to Balak an hour ago I had no idea where I'd go from here or what I'd do next, but now it's all settled. I'm going after Black Heart—alone. I like the idea of taking him single-handed."

"No, no, *señor*," protested Carlos. "You are mad. It is fatal."

"Oh, I'm not planning to round up the whole gang," laughed Ralston. "I'll simply trail them and some time, somewhere I'll catch Black Heart away from the others. Then a gun in his ribs will keep him quiet till I can get him under way."

"But, *señor*, think of all the lawless fiends that surround him and guard him. They will wait for you by some trail and plunge a *bolo* in your back as you pass."

Ralston merely repeated that he liked the idea of taking Black Heart single-handed. Carlos protested volubly, but his many warnings failed of their aim and half an hour later the white man strode out of Balak. His belt was full of cartridges and his revolver hung slightly loosened in its holster, ready for a speedy draw. He followed a trail that ran south, back and up into the mountains; for he had come down the eastern trail that morning and knew Black Heart had not gone in that direction.

BY THE time Ralston had left Balak three miles behind him the sun was low in the west, slanting up against the rugged hills.

He was moving cautiously and watching closely. The trail was narrow and took many sudden turns around huge boulders. Ralston was abreast of one such boulder. A short, extremely broad-shouldered native darted out and blocked the foot-wide trail. One second the trail had been clear, the next it was blocked and in that same instant the keen point of a *bolo* rested lightly against Ralston's left breast. He halted perforce, and two piercing black eyes held his cool gray ones with unruffled calm.

The thought that flashed into his mind was to spring backward, whip out his revolver and fire pointblank.

The native pointed down to his left foot with a swift gesture of his left hand. Ralston's eyes followed the pointing fingers and he knew that his thought had been anticipated.

He saw a grass rope stretched taut across the trail, one end attached to a root at the base of the boulder. The native's booted left foot was well under the taut rope. Ralston had seen these traps before. He knew the unseen end of that rope connected with a trigger arrangement, knew that a sharp jerk of the booted foot would spring the trap and so release a powerful bamboo-pole which now lay concealed in the grass beside the trail, bent half-double. Then the bent pole would straighten out with the speed and power of steel, would sweep across the trail and strike him from behind. And the least he could expect would be two broken legs. He had seen one soldier's legs so broken. He knew also that any forward move on his part, or even the slightest lifting of either hand would mean the *bolo* driven through his heart. No doubt about that.

The long, narrow-shouldered white man and the short, broad-shouldered brown man stood looking, each into the other's eyes, silent, alert.

"Well," said Ralston at last, "you have it all your own way. What do you want?"

The brown man's *bolo* was still at Ralston's heart, his foot still under the taut rope.

"Luis, Pedro," he called in Tagal. "Come and see. I have snared a partner for Gogo."

"A partner for Gogo!" The native's voice had been a verbal leer when he said that. Ralston felt vaguely uneasy. He wondered who or what Gogo might be.

Luis and Pedro came from behind the boulder. They were grinning the way fiends grin at some sinister joke. They set their rifles aside and, at their leader's orders, tied Ralston's hands together before him. They stripped off his belt and revolver and led him forward a safe distance from the trap. The one called Pedro stepped well back out of danger, drew his *bolo*, threw it and neatly severed the trap-rope. The released bamboo-pole swished across the trail, hissing, mowing down grass and small bushes, just as Ralston had known it would do. Pedro picked up his *bolo* and stood toying it idly.

"This is a fine gang of knife-throwing, trap-setting cutthroats I've blundered into," Ralston told himself.

For a moment he was fear-sick and weak all over. Then he caught himself up with a jerk and the short, broad-shouldered chief was speaking in eccentric but altogether understandable English.

"Meester Rarso," he said, "ef you like try what you call monkee beezness—look out. My men an' me too, we throw the *bolo* veree straight an' quick an' we shoot same way."

"You're Black Heart, ain't you?" asked Ralston, speaking his own particular brand of English.

"Yes, I Black Heart. You have come to take me what you call single han'. I here. Why you not take?"

Ralston didn't bother to answer this taunt. He eyed the other up and down and the other seemed to like it. He postured vainly, his hands resting on the belt full of cartridges that circled his waist. A revolver hung at his right hip, and his *bolo*, sheathed now, dangled at his left side. He wore black, high-top boots; heavy, white drill riding-breeches and a close-buttoned blouse of the same cloth. His head was covered by an English-type sun-helmet, the brim of which drooped almost to his wide shoulders.

"Conceited popinjay," Ralston thought, "but he's a clever —— just the same."

Then aloud to Black Heart:

"You had the trap all set and waiting for me, and you just told me a minute ago what I came for. How did you know about it?"

"Black Heart know manee theengs, Meester Rarso. He tell you 'bout trap when we camp tonight. Now we mus' hike."

Pedro and Luis shouldered their rifles and took their places, one before and one behind Ralston. Pedro walked in front, leading the white man by the rope that bound his hands. Black Heart brought up the rear. The way was tortuous and up—decidedly up. Ponies could not have come this way. Black Heart had sent his troop around by a longer trail, one they could travel. Pedro and Luis scrambled and scurried along with the agility of monkeys; and they shoved and dragged Ralston with them. Their bare feet pattered the jagged, pitted lava that hurt the white man even through his shoe-soles.

The red haze and glow of after-sunset faded and the stars came out, pure needle-points of light in a liquid-blue dome.

Time passed. Ralston considered the chances of escape. He thought them small. The *ladrones* were leaving no trail on the bare lava. Still there was hope, for the soldiers would hear of his disappearance—Carlos Campango would see to that—and they would surely find him somehow.

ELEVEN o'clock came. They had been five hours under the stars, five hard-driven hours of up-and-over going. They topped a high peak that was very near Amuyao's summit.

Black Heart ordered a halt and after warning his two men to guard Ralston closely, he worked his way down the peak on the opposite side from where they had ascended. The starlight clearly revealed his course. He moved noiselessly, swinging down low cliffs, holding to roots and vines for support, crawling on hands and knees, stopping, listening intently. At last he wormed out on a narrow lava-ledge and lay flat, watching a silvery little stream that worried its way along the mountainside far below.

Ralston's legs cramped with waiting. He shifted slightly and started to rise. Pedro raised his *bolo*—a grim warning. The white man settled back on his heels. Then came a peculiar cry as of some night-bird. A short silence and the cry was repeated from below, three times at even intervals. Black Heart called to the guards and they hustled Ralston down to their leader. From there they all descended to the little stream where they met a motley cavalcade. Breech-clouts, *bolos* and old Springfield rifles formed the total of their accoutrements. They stood silently in the water, strung out along the creek-bed.

The troop numbered some thirty-odd men and perhaps forty ponies, many of the latter straining under heavy packs—the loot from Balak. Ponies and men alike were wet the full length of their legs. They had come a long way in that stream.

Ralston's hope of rescue took a jarring drop. Black Heart's men had left behind them precious few tracks for either soldiers or constabulary to follow.

Black Heart gave an order and his troop left the water in single-file. They spread out over a narrow, level strip of bare ground that bordered the stream at this point. Then followed the business of making camp. Fires were kindled. The low babble of voices mingled with the sighs of ponies as their packs were stripped off. The smell of frying rice, of boiling coffee and tobacco-smoke rose up and pervaded the air.

Ralston sat near the fire at which Luis was cooking rice. Pedro leaned against a boulder watching like a cat, his arms folded, his drawn *bolo* swinging in his right hand. The white man was weighing the chances of a sudden dash for the edge of a dense jungle which began a short distance down stream. Could the watching Pedro, with all his uncanny accuracy, throw his big knife and stick a running, dodging man? This was the question that the issue hung upon. Ralston decided to take the chance. His hands were still tied but his feet were as yet free.

A slight move. Ralston raised his eyes and saw Black Heart standing before him, his right hand resting on the butt of his gun.

"It would be certain death, Meester Rarso."

"What would be certain death?"

"To run for the jungle."

"I hadn't thought of trying it," Ralston blandly asserted.

"Ha! I am meestake, then. But ef I be you I would think such way."

"You're an uncanny ——," Ralston thought, but didn't say it. "I wonder how far your limit really reaches?"

Black Heart called some instructions to Pedro, and Ralston, understanding Tagal, was not pleased with what he heard. Pedro, obeying the order, brought a pair of leg-irons and stooped toward the white man's ankles. Ralston was minded to resist, but Black Heart, as usual, anticipated him. The chief drew his revolver and stroked the long blue barrel caressingly, as if that had been his sole reason for bringing the weapon out. Pedro snapped the irons about Ralston's ankles and then unbound his wrists.

"Give the white man some coffee and rice," Black Heart instructed Luis, speaking in Tagal. "He will need it to hike on in the morning."

And so Ralston, shackled and a prisoner, drank coffee and ate fried rice at midnight with the man he had set out to capture single-handed.

"I'm still itching to hear how you knew I was coming up that trail," Ralston told Black Heart.

And the native seemed glad of the opportunity to talk about himself. In fact he never missed a chance to boast.

"It is veree simple, Meester Rarso," he explained with mock politeness. "I have what you call a agent in Balak—I have one in everee *barrio*—an' he was in the church with the others an' they are not know he is my agent. But when he hear you say you go get Black Heart single-han' he come where he know I be waitin' an' tell me. I always wait so for my agent. Then he come tell me ef somebody follow."

"What do you intend to do with me?" Ralston asked after some reflection.

"Ha! You weel be the partner for Gogo."

"Who is Gogo?"

"You weel see heem tomorrow night."

Again Pedro and Luis grinned in sinister glee and again Ralston had an uneasy feeling that "a partner for Gogo" had some horrible meaning that he did not yet understand.

FOUR hours later Ralston was aroused from hard sleep by the squealing and grunting of ponies as their packs were cinched on. The *ladrones* were preparing to break camp though it was not yet daylight. In a few minutes the troop began to get under way, men and ponies moving silently now in single file, climbing a dim trail that led to the bare lava-ridges above.

Ralston's guards removed the irons from his legs and bound his wrists again. Pedro led him at the rear of the column and Luis walked behind, swinging his drawn *bolo*.

Daylight came and the sun grew hot. Shimmering heat-waves rose up and danced in the distance. The ponies staggered and careened over the bare lava, missing deep fissures by scant inches. All semblance of the trail had disappeared when they reached the high ridges. Soon the terrane began to slope gradually southward and the *ladrones* followed the down grade.

About noon the gradual slope changed suddenly to a steep descent. At the foot of this descent was a small valley with a shallow mountain stream running through it. A thatched native hut stood beside the stream and across the valley a herd of about fifty ponies browsed on dry grass.

As the *ladrones* passed the thatched hut, a native came out and exchanged a few friendly words with Black Heart. Ralston didn't catch what these two said but it was obvious that they knew each other well. The troop went down into the stream, single file, and took the upward course.

The little valley ceased abruptly at the base of a towering cliff, and here the stream came down through a deep, narrow gorge. The *ladrones* followed the water-course. The banks, high overhead, were fortified by a dense tangle of tropic vines and bushes that lapped and interlaced across the gorge. It was like a tunnel filled with dim twilight. Men and ponies, trudging half-leg deep in the swift water, slipped and reeled on wet stones. Then, after about two hours of such going, they came into open sunlight and another tiny valley, about two acres in size.

On the opposite side from where they entered this valley, the stream pitched down a steep lava-ledge in a hissing, foaming, white waterfall. Ralston knew at once that a cave of some sort was hidden behind the waterfall, for two *ladrones*, camp-keepers, came out and greeted the others.

Pedro and Luis put the leg-irons on the white man again and then lashed him to a small coco-palm. The *ladrones* bunched their ponies about the valley and began taking off the packs. This done they tied the little animals together in half a dozen different groups and as many men led them back downstream.

As Ralston stood braced against the coco-palm, watching the ponies going downstream, Black Heart came and spoke to him.

"You are theenk where my ponies be go now, eh, Meester Rarso? I weel tell you. They go to pony rancho in the valley below here. The *hombre* what spick weeth me down there, he own the rancho an' he keep my ponies for me. Then evereebodee theenk they be hees ponies."

It was patent that Black Heart had volunteered this explanation solely to show off what he considered another clever maneuver on his part. In weariness of this eternal boasting, Ralston turned his head away. He saw *ladrones* carrying packs of loot in behind that foaming, white curtain of water. He watched this work for several moments and then turned back to Black Heart.

"You're not doing very well by your friend the ranch owner," he remarked. "When the soldiers come and get you and rescue me, I'll remember to tell 'em who keeps your ponies."

"Ha!" Black Heart snorted his contempt. "Ha! The partner for Gogo weel tell nothin'."

He leered at Ralston gloatingly and went among his men.

Dusk began to gather in the little valley. The men who had taken the ponies down stream returned empty-handed. The loot had all been stored away. Ralston's guards released him from the coco-palm and led him in behind the waterfall.

He found himself in an enormous cavern poorly lighted by a few uncleaned, untrimmed oil-lamps that gave off flaring, yellow flames. It was a cavern of many chambers and all of them had been hewn in the solid, lava-walls. Numerous fissures open clear to the mountain surface, afforded the place plenty of air.

From some chamber far back in that vast cavern, Ralston heard faint laughter and snatches of song. The *ladrones* were celebrating their raid.

From the time he entered the cavern Ralston's guards conducted him along the right-hand wall and now they led him into a chamber in perfect contrast to the others he had seen. It was brilliantly lighted by a number of well-cleaned and trimmed lamps. Huge grass-mats with curious and beautiful designs woven into them, hung to the lava-walls, festooned with a marvelous collection of fighting blades; a rapier from France, daggers from Italy and Spain, *bolos* of many types and several long, wavy streamers of double-edged steel from Moroland.

The floor of this chamber was pure teak, smooth as a mirror surface, the joining seams invisible. In the center was a square table of genuine ebony, black as polished coal. Several hand-made, hand-carved chairs stood at random about the table. In one of these chairs, Black Heart lounged at ease, puffing cigaret-smoke. The front of his white blouse was open now, displaying a gorgeous and gaudy silk shirt.

"Be seet, Meester Rarso," the chief invited with a flourish of his hand.

Ralston sat down, his hands tied before him, the chain of his leg-irons clanking discordantly. At an order from Black Heart, Luis untied the white man's hands. Pedro squatted near the chamber entrance, drew his *bolo* and laid it across his knees. Luis went out and a few minutes later Ralston heard him heartily acclaimed as he joined his carousing fellows.

"Meester Rarso," said Black Heart, "you have say the soldiers weel come. You are not believe that, Meester Rarso. You *sabe* all time we have leave no trail behin' us. Soldiers no can follow. But mabe so got beeg luck—fin' thees place. No can take. Thees ees what you call stronghold. For three hundred year my familee are be *ladrones* in thees cave an' nobodee have take."

"You mean," asked Ralston, "that about five generations of *ladrones*, your ancestors, have lived here in this cave and handed down the chieftainship like a kingdom, from father to son?"

"I am the seex chief," Black Heart answered proudly.

Ralston looked around him, inclined to believe the chief's claim true. Certainly no one generation had hewn all these chambers out of the solid lava.

Black Heart leaned toward the table, picked up a small silver bell and shook it. Almost before the timkle was hushed, a wrinkled, little old Tagal came in.

"Juan," said Black Heart addressing the wrinkled one, "the *señor blanco*, tonight he eat same lak Black Heart, smoke plentee an' dreenk bes' wine."

"*Sabe*, master," and the little old fellow pattered out.

"You told him," observed Ralston, "that I eat and drink the best tonight. What do I eat after tonight?"

"Ha! I are feed you good tonight so you weel know how Black Heart live. Eet weel make you feel veree bad other nights when you live same lak Gogo, for Gogo he eat not so good."

"I see," said Ralston. "This is to be a sort of teaser in the future when I eat like Gogo, not so good."

Juan returned bearing a wooden tray promiscuously heaped with dishes, food, bottles, cigarets and a box of cigars.

When the table was set, Black Heart poured wine from a bottle that had been sealed in Spain many years before. He carved juicy slices from a whole roast pig and helped Ralston in regular civilzed fashion.

"You go now an' feast weeth the others," Black Heart told Juan.

The little old cook went happily. Ralston sipped wine and ate gratefully, for he was hungry. Still he found time to wonder at the unusualness of it all: At the good wheat flour bread, recently baked, he leaned toward Black Heart and asked—

"How did you and Juan learn all this white man stuff—cooking, speaking English and everything?"

"Come insurrection," replied the chief, "no good *ladrone* beezness. So Juan an' Black Heart go work on schooner what belong one *Americano*. He make trade in South Seas. Juan work in galley an' I be boss deck-han'. We be on schooner three year. Then come home."

The rest of the meal passed in silence, except when Black Heart urged his guest to another helping of pork. They finished and pushed their chairs slightly back from the table. Black Heart passed the cigars. They bore an excellent Cuban brand. The chief lighted one and leaned back.

"Now eet ees time we be amuse," he told Ralston.

Then to Pedro in Tagal—

"Bring in Gogo."

A few minutes later a heavy-muscled, light-skinned native came in, followed by Pedro. Ralston knew him at once for a *mestizo*. He was clad in a dingy shirt of coarse, heavy cloth that terminated at his knees, leaving his bulging calves bare. He stopped near the table, silent, sullen. After one swift glance at Ralston, his gaze focused on Black Heart, his eyes blazing hatred, his whole being the personification of imprisoned fury. Ralston fancied he could feel the fire of the man's hate.

"Meester Rarso," said Black Heart, "thees ees Gogo. Seex months ago he have be one proud sergeant in constabulary. Then he come for see where Black Heart live. My men catch heem on trail an' now he no can spick, no can hear. We have cut hees tongue out an' steek hees ears inside weeth one sharp needle. An' tomorrow, Meester Rarso, come for take Black Heart single-han', we feex you same way. Then you weel be the partner for Gogo."

Ralston felt himself trembling with anger and horror. He clinched his teeth and gripped the sides of his chair, fighting for control, but said nothing. He knew well that any protest on his part would be taken for weakness and so merely serve to gratify Black Heart.

Despite his emotions, however, the white man was keenly alert. It was his nature to keep on trying to the end. Even if Black Heart's men had been standing by with tools ready for their fiendish surgery, he still would have been on the lookout for a chance to escape.

Black Heart made a gesture with his hand, palm forward, the way Tagals beckon. Gogo went toward the chief, his eyes gleaming hate. Black Heart pointed to the floor at his feet and the *mestizo* knelt there, slowly, sullenly.

"See, Meester Rarso, he kneel for honor Black Heart."

Ralston said nothing. He was busy with a thought that kept pacing back and forth in his mind, like a sentinel that marches to and fro on a short beat. It was this—

"Gogo has been in the constabulary."

Over and over again, unbidden, the fact announced itself—

"Gogo has been in the constabulary."

"Well, what of it?"

Ralston found himself thinking this question in a doubtful sense. But the answer was reassuring. It came like an explosion in his head.

"Wigwag!"

Black Heart snapped his fingers with an upward flourish of his hand. Gogo rose and began thumping the floor with his bare feet in a series of clumsy, grotesque motions that were supposed to constitute a dance. Black Heart puffed his cigar, sipped wine, his eyes half-closed, and watched with fiendish satisfaction. Gogo went on with his grotesque dance, as sullen as a trained bear that has been whipped hard and often to make it perform. Pedro, like his chief, followed the dance with absorbed interest. The scene was gratifying to their lust for cruelty.

Ralston, however, paid scant heed to these two. He was engrossed in the possibilities of communicating with Gogo by means of wigwag. He felt sure that the *mestizo*, a sergeant of constabulary, would know the code. It was a part of ordinary army training; and the white officers of the constabulary drilled their little brown men very thoroughly.

Ralston sat at one end of the table and Gogo danced at some distance from the opposite end. Thus Black Heart and Pedro, as they watched the dance, were looking away from Ralston. This was the first bit of luck he had experienced since his capture. It gave him an even chance to signal Gogo without being noticed. Presently he caught the *mestizo's* eye. He used his open hand in place of a flag, making a series of sharp, distinct motions from right to left, left to right. Gogo nodded that he understood.

Ralston's mind, spurred by desperation, had been working with electric speed and he had already formed a plan of action. He began relating this plan to Gogo in the wigwag code. And as he signaled, Gogo nodded assent, approval, with slight motions of his head that might easily have been the result of his dancing.

Ralston finished his message and, with a final nod of understanding, Gogo began dancing in wider circles. He gathered up the tail of his long shirt in both hands and his bare feet fairly skimmed over the smooth floor. He whirled and curved and spun with all the energy of a wound-up top.

"*Bueno*, Gogo!" Black Heart shouted and straightened in his chair.

Even Pedro, squatted near the chamber entrance, grinned amusedly. Evidently Gogo had never before put so much ginger into a dance. At last he danced up close to Pedro, still holding his long shirt tail in both hands.

At that instant, Ralston's right hand swept across the table, seized a wine bottle and crashed it against Black Heart's temple. Followed a shower of glass and Black Heart dropped to the floor—out.

Ralston had the brown man's gun and belt in less than a minute.

In the meantime Gogo had been very much on the job at his end. Gaging Ralston's first move to a second, he had snapped the tail of his shirt, like a sack, over Pedro's head. Then he drew the cloth close about the *ladrone's* neck and by twisting hard, quickly choked his man insensible.

Ralston turned from his business with Black Heart just in time to see Gogo snatch up Pedro's *bolo*, which had clattered to the floor, and raise it for a blow. The white man tried to interfere but the leg-irons kept him from getting there in time. So the heavy, keen edged knife fell across Pedro's throat with fatal accuracy.

Gogo found the key that unlocked Ralston's leg-irons in a fold of Pedro's breech-clout. And about this time, Black Heart began to show signs of returning life. Ralston stooped over the fallen chief, gun ready and hissed in his ear—

"One peep out of you, and I'll blow the top of your head off, and run for it."

Black Heart proved his discretion by holding his tongue. Gogo brought the rope that had been used on Ralston and they tied Black Heart's hands. They lifted him, still weak from the blow he had received, and half-supporting him between them, hurried toward the waterfall and the outside.

As they went, Ralston heard the *ladrones* still at their merry-making, their voices louder now from the effects of *vino*. As yet they were unaware of recent events in their chief's chamber.

Upon coming near the waterfall, Gogo darted ahead, poising the *bolo* with which he had dispatched Pedro. When Ralston, with his prisoner, reached the outside, he found Gogo standing like a statue in the starlight, a little brown Tagal sprawled limp and quivering at his feet. This had been the sentry on watch and Gogo was taking no chances that night.

They left the valley wading down the little stream, Gogo in the lead and Ralston behind, gun-muzzle jammed against Black Heart's back.

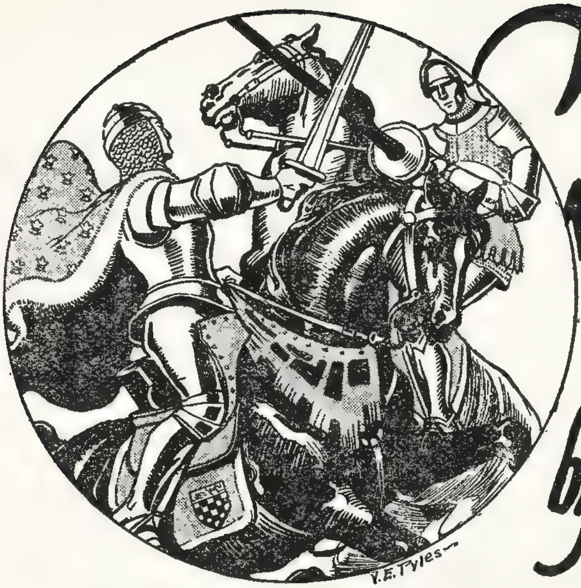
LATE the next afternoon the trio staggered into Balak, with Gogo the principal source of motive power. For Ralston and Black Heart had had just four hours' sleep and about sixty hours of hiking in the past seventy-two.

The soldiers had arrived in Balak. The captors of Black Heart were immediately surrounded and overwhelmed with congratulations and questions. The handshaking was over, the adventure had been related in a few terse words and the young officer in command of the soldiers was saying to Ralston—

"If I can ever be of service personally, why just——"

"Take you up on that," Ralston clipped in. "Soon as we reach Vigan I'm going wire-pulling to get a pension for Gogo. He was acting under orders, you know, when Black Heart nabbed him; so all that's happened to him happened in the line of duty. Can I count on you to help me?"

"You just know you can," answered the young officer earnestly. "And my dad's on the general staff at Washington, too. That should help some."



The Wolf of the Mountain

A COMPLETE NOVELETTE

by H.C.Bailey

Author of "Blood Royal," "The Lord of St. Lo," etc.

IN THE year of our Lord 1486 Sir Silvain de St. Lo took the road to Italy. For he had an ambition, like other men of the sword from Hannibal to Napoleon, to make that land serve him. Folks told him that it was a land of gold and ivory, where each and all had their heart's desire of pleasure and would give rich honor to a knight who guarded their paradise. Silvain led Thibaut, his squire, on an invasion.

But Messire Thibaut shivered and groaned. Who goes to Italy by land must go among mountains. They had chosen the easiest pass in all the Alps; but that way by Mont Genèvre, the road of many armies, takes a man through the crags and the snow of Dauphiny. It was early Summer, and out of the rocks glowed gentian and the rosy stars of saxifrage. Thibaut had no joy in that. Thibaut huddled himself in the keen wind. Thibaut lifted his eyes to the jagged peaks above the glacier, sharp as saw teeth against the blue light of the sky and wriggled his unshorn face.

"Who says that hell is under the earth? It is there, it is there," he moaned. "Who says that hell is hot? It is cold, cold as my feet. I am the man in the Scripture, I fear that which is high."

"Courage, brother," Silvain laughed. "Now we go down."

Thibaut cried out in anguish. They had come over the top of the Col du Lautaret; they saw the track wind away into dark gulfs and vanish.

"Our Mother help us, it is worse to look down than to look up."

"See the rich valley opening beyond. We shall be in a kind land soon."

Thibaut reined up his horse.

"I was almost in it then," he shuddered. "My Lord, where is your vinegar?"

Silvain stared at him.

"The Lord Hannibal when he crossed the mountains took vinegar to melt them. A wise man he. But, oh my poor head, what a salad!"

He dismounted and began to lead his horse, not without reason, for the track was steep and of rough rock, and the zigzags were sharp; and from the outer edge a man might fall a hundred feet or a thousand. But Silvain rode on fast.

"Go your ways; you have always rare luck with your neck," said Messire Thibaut. "But I never had any to waste."

And he followed like a dog on a grating.

The track twisted this way and that down the mountainside. Silvain was hidden, came into sight, was lost again. Thibaut looked down over bare crags to a dark pine forest and drew back and huddled himself and his horse into the rock wall. Faintly he heard a din from below, the scrambling of hoofs and shouts and the crash of a fall.

"Pity me! Here is comfort for a poor man," Thibaut groaned. "What is it like when it happens, brother? I have fallen a thousand times in my heart."

And then he heard Silvain shout:

"St. Denis to aid! Fight! Fight it yet!"

"God help you, what are you at now?" Thibaut groaned and tied his horse to a rock and lay down and wriggled his head over the edge of the precipice.

Far below where the track climbed out of the forest a column of laden mules was halted, and in and out among the mules there was fighting. The muleteers were attacked from the head and the rear of their column by two little bands of men; and though they had rallied against the first party and stood together sturdily they fared ill behind where they were scattered. It was a fight of daggers and body to body; and men were thrust off the narrow track to cling helpless and desperate to the crags or to fall sheer and swift to an unseen death.

On this struggle Silvain came headlong, shattered the first band of robbers by the crash of his onset, sprang from his horse and saved it and went on afoot crying:

"St. Denis to aid! France! France! For the king!"

Messire Thibaut shouted so that the mountains echoed: "France! France!" and he put his hands to his mouth and made a noise like a trumpet call. What were left of the robbers could be seen wavering at this sudden fierce knight and the sounds of other force behind him.

"Not sure yet, my children?" said Thibaut, and he took the crossbow from his back and set a bolt to the string. "Oh, mother, is it the bolt or myself I shoot?" he groaned, as he wriggled arms and shoulders over the edge.

That bolt did not hurt any man, for it hit the rock above the mules and fell down among them spent. But its coming made fear, for the robbers, looking anxiously up to see what more was upon them, heard Thibaut shout:

"Bowmen! Line the road and pick them off, the knaves."

Another bolt he shot and saw the robbers break from Silvain's eager sword and abandon the track and plunge away like chamois over the rocks and out of sight.

"God save them, poor souls, what a life is theirs!" said Thibaut and stood up shaking.

But when he came down to the place of the fight he was in the saddle; and he rode with an air, head back, iron cap over one eye, hand on hip.

"Good faith, my lord, I blame you," he said. "This is a little matter and not worth your care."

Silvain laughed and turned to the leader of the mule-train, an old fellow of some bulk and dignity.

"Here is the man who saved you, friend. It is my squire Thibaut, who is all my force."

"Is it possible?" The old fellow stared. "You are well served, sir. So you should be. For you are a knight of a quick, high courage."

And he went off to make his men busy in hauling their fallen comrades on the rock face up to the track again.

"Kiss my foot, said the sheep to the shepherd," Thibaut grimaced. "Who is this mule-driver that plays the lord to us?"

"He is a great man, brother," Silvain smiled. "He is a merchant out of Italy, and he brings gifts from the Duke of Milan to the king."

The old merchant had a clear head and a masterful will; his men worked for him eagerly. The fallen who had not gone to their death were soon up in safety, loads shifted so that they could ride, the whole train marshaled and ready to move.

He came bustling back to Silvain.

"This is wicked work, sir. I have lost two mules over the cliff. One laden with silk of Syria, one with silver from Florence."

"Oh, evil day, brother," Thibaut groaned. "Wo is me that you are alive to tell it."

The old man stared at him.

"I take you to witness this was done by brigands and in the realm of France."

"We have seen, friend," Silvain said. "March on, and I will bring you safe through the mountains to Grenoble."

The old man shook his head.

"I venture no more. I go back to Briançon. If that is your way, ride with me and I will thank you for it."

"Friend, you owe me nothing," said Silvain. "Follow me, and I will bring you safe."

The old merchant saluted him gravely by way of answer, and he rode on, Messire Thibaut at his left hand. Not till they were gone some distance were the mules started, and then the old fellow took his place at the rear of the column with every man who had not a mule to drive marshaled as his guard.

But they had no more alarms. Out of the fragrant gloom of the pines they came safe down into the valley and saw green pasture again and peaceful tilled land and at last houses where the castle of Le Monêtier guarded the pass. There was no challenge from the tower, and they went on faster by an easier road till the walls of Briançon rose before them where valleys and rivers meet.

Then the old man drove his mule on, spoke with the guard at the gate and passed them in; and they climbed the steep street where the water races by the houses and came to the castle.

THE Governor of Dauphiny was a burly, ruddy soldier. He sat in his hall jovial among his gentlemen. But at the sight of the old merchant his mirth was ended in a roar.

"Master Cosimo! ——, Master Cosimo, what the —— brings you here again? Is the king to wait on your silly pleasure? You should have been thirty miles away tonight."

"You speak truth, my lord," said the merchant coldly.

"I thank you!" the governor laughed. "Here is gracious courtesy! And what do you speak, in ——'s name? What are you doing, old snail? And what fellows are these you bring me?"

"A knight of France and his squire who have done your king good service this day."

"The —— burn your impudence! That is for me to judge, not you."

"Judge then, my lord," the merchant said coldly. "I led out my train on the road to Grenoble, and when I came to the castle at Le Monêtier men challenged me in the name of the constable."

A gaunt, grizzled man cried out—

"It is an old order, my lord; it is my right and duty."

"I am glad that the constable of Le Monêtier is here," the merchant said. "I told his men who I was, and they offered me a guard through the mountains."

The constable licked his lips.

"Why sir, do you complain of that?

"They asked a price," Master Cosimo smiled. "A hundred crowns I was to pay, or no guard for me."

The governor turned upon the constable. "Is this your right? Go hang yourself for a greedy knave."

"By your leave, my lord, I have an ancient right to toll on all goods which travel that way."

"The fiend take you and your tolls! Do you levy on the king's goods?"

"God forbid!" The constable wiped his brow. "My rogues have done me a wrong. But how should they know the man served the king? He is an Italian and a close, cunning fellow. I will be sworn they took him for a rogue merchant who would cheat them of their dues."

"I think I speak plain, my lord," said Master Cosimo. "I said that I would pay no Frenchman to guard the goods of the King of France. And they bade me go hang. It was not in my mind that the governor could not keep the roads of his province safe."

"Can I not!"

The governor beat upon the table.

"You do not. For as we came out of the forest near the summit of the pass a band of robbers broke upon us, and six of my men are wounded and three thrown over the cliff to their death; and also I have lost two mules, one laden with silver from Florence and one with silk of Syria. And indeed we should have lost all but for this knight and his squire, who fought for us boldly and wisely. I commend them to your nobility. Also I desire quittance for the good merchandise."

The governor broke out in oaths and stopped himself with an effort more alarming than the explosion.

"You, sir! What have you to tell me?"

He turned lowering brows on Silvain, but spoke mildly.

"That I am Silvain de St. Lo, my lord."

"——, I do not know your name."

"Alas, my lord, I feared it. But I think that you will. In this matter, what I did was nothing. For the rest, it was what Master Cosimo has said. This only I marked that the robbers cried, 'The Wolf, the Wolf of the Mountain!' as if it were the name of their captain."

"That knave!" the constable cried out.

"Oh, you know him, do you?" said the governor.

"My lord, he is the bane of all the mountain roads."

Then Silvain said gently,

"This I hoped," and he laughed. "Good

my lord, give me the venture. Let me hunt this Wolf on his Mountain."

"——, is that all you ask?"

The governor lay back in his chair and stared, and his bluff, bullying face was mellowed.

"My lord, I know that it is a great thing," Silvain said gently. "God Himself has no more to give than a venture of honor."

The governor kicked the shins of the constable of Le Monêtier.

"Look at him well. Here is a man who asks not money, but fighting."

"My lord, I envy him. I wish I had his youth."

"You were a cub of another litter, old fox. Tell me, what the —— do you do for your living? When did you hunt this Wolf who prowls on your roads?"

"My lord, I have hunted the knave all the year, and I thought I had driven him out of my land. But there are many lairs in the mountains."

"I warrant there are. And why should our constable bring him to bay? He is —— useful. While he prowls, travelers need a guard; and for a guard they have to pay the good constable. The —— take you, he must be worth a king's revenue to Le Monêtier. Kill him? Not you! You know better."

"By my faith, my lord, you do me wrong. I take you to witness, no traveler has made complaint of my road in your day till Master Cosimo came."

The governor's bloodshot eyes twinkled.

"Aye, that was an ill coming. The others, they paid and were safe or the Wolf ate them. Hark you, friend, do you know this Wolf?"

"How should I know him?" The constable flushed. "I would to —— I had ever come up with him! One of us would have died that day."

"Oh, you bark loud. I keep no dogs that do not bite. ——, you were made constable of Le Monêtier to keep the king's road safe, not to fill your purse."

The constable flushed and grew pale.

"This is hard measure, my lord. I have held Le Monêtier and done the king's work many a year and there was never a word against me till now. Trust me, I will not rest till I have brought you this Wolf's head."

"You have had your turn. It is another man's now." He chuckled. "But be comforted. There is no rest for you. Take horse and bring this knight to Le Monêtier and set him on the trail of your Wolf and give him all he asks."

He turned to Silvain.

"You have your venture, lad. Bring me this Wolf's head—" he chuckled—"and bring it alive if you can."

He held out his big red hand.

"Take horses of mine and begone. Good fortune. 'Ware wolf and 'ware fox! ——, I would it were you who sat here and I who rode."

"Yet you should be happy, my lord," said Silvain gently, "for you make men proud to serve you."

SO THROUGH the gloaming Silvain and Thibaut rode back up the valley; and Messire Thibaut mourned that he was a bird jumping off its perch and back again, and none comforted him. For the constable held Silvain in talk. He had no bitterness. He praised Silvain; he praised the governor, and occasionally he praised himself.

The only evil he knew of was the Wolf of the Mountain, and he made the fellow a devil with horns and claws and tail. Hunt him? As well hunt a storm. Twice when the constable had drawn the net close about him he broke out, and only dead men could tell how.

The peasants swore they had seen him riding an avalanche, flying from one mountain peak to another on clouds. They believed that he had his lair in the crevasses of the glacier.

Good reason they had to fear him. Men had been found wandering with their eyes put out; women had crawled back to their homes mutilated for the Wolf's pleasure.

Silvain crossed himself.

"I thank God for this good venture," he said.

The constable for the first time kept silence a moment. Then he gave Silvain more praise: A gallant knight, a man for noble deeds.

"Oh, sir, here is enough of me," Silvain broke in. "Who I am I know. But who is this Wolf?"

The constable laughed.

"That no man knows. Some broken soldier out of Italy, they say, or a German *lanzknecht*. By my faith, I can not guess. When you bring in his head, we may find a name for him."

"The dead will not speak. It is my task to bring him alive."

And again the constable was silent.

"By the Mass, you are hopeful," he said at last, and said no more.

When they came to the castle there was some delay to let them in, and the men who came with lanterns to take their horses revealed many curious faces in the background. Silvain looked about him and lingered, but the constable hurried them on into the dim-lit hall and there left them with courteous excuses, that he had taken his servants by surprize and feared all things were unready and must give orders.

"This lord is like a cat," said Thibaut gloomily. "He purrs and purrs. But who knows what is in his brindled head?"

From the gloom some one said, "Meow!" Into the light of the candles on the high table came a little woman. She swept a courtesy.

"Good even to you, good mice," said she.

While she was down in her courtsey she was nothing but a round, rosy face rising from a spread of blue mantle. She lacked a body. Even when she stood up again there was not much of it. But her face had life enough and vigor.

"I am the ghost of Le Monêtier," she said, and her dark eyes were mischievous.

She laughed, but there was something not mirthful in the thrust of her little chin.

"What is on your soul, my fair ghost, that you can not rest?" Silvain smiled.

"I look for a man, and I can not find him."

"He has ill fortune that he does not hear you."

She put her head on one side.

"Does he not then?" she said demurely.

"Tell me, pretty ghost, what do you need a man for?"

"Alas, that you have not seen it! I am a woman, sir."

"It is indeed the noblest thing that one can be in this world," said Silvain gently.

"But would you be such a thing if you could?"

"I know that I am not worthy." Silvain bowed.

"Good faith, I am not so sure," she cried and tossed her head.

And then the constable bustled in.

"Your pardon. You have waited too long, but you shall fare the better."

He saw the blue mantle behind Silvain.

"Renée! I thought you were abed, child; you did not come to meet me. So much the better! Now I have a hostess for you, sir. It is Renée de Chambran, my ward."

"He took me for a ghost," she laughed as Silvain kissed her hands. "Well, sir, am I flesh and blood?"

"For an imp," the constable said. "Never heed her. She is as full of mischief as these bottles of good wine."

He nodded at the table where his servants were busy.

"Sir, you live merrily in Le Monêtier," said Silvain.

"Now the man knows me, but I know not him."

Renée sat herself down by a dish of sweetmeats. "It is the fate of woman."

"Do him honor, child. He is Sir Silvain de St. Lo, a noble knight.

"Then what is he doing here?" said Renée with her mouth full.

The constable made believe to box her ears.

"He is a knight errant and rides on lonely ventures of honor."

Renée stayed her hand on the sugared strawberries.

"There is no lack in this land. God send him courage," she said gravely and looked full at Silvain.

"Come, sir, we are served," the constable cried. "To table!"

There was no fault in the fare of that supper save that the constable talked more about it than a good host should. Indeed he talked of nothing else till the servants were gone and he had sent the little woman to bed. Then he drew his chair closer to Silvain and, bidding Thibaut take another bottle to his corner, became portentous.

There was news of the Wolf. Some of the constable's men out on patrol in the higher pastures to guard the peasants' cattle had fought with the Wolf's band and marked them to ground above the glaciers of the Mountain of the Lambs. The rogues were in a hurry and some of them laden. The constable had no doubt but that the whole band were gathered there. It was their custom to go into hiding far from the place where they had made a big foray. He drew a map on the table with chicken bones for mountains and salt for glaciers and streaks of wine for valleys.

"A strong place to hold, sir—" he shook his grizzled head—"and a strong band are they. I pray you, let me give you men to ride with you. Or I myself will serve you. You command me and all of mine."

"Sir, you are generous. But this is a lone venture for me, or I have no honor in it."

"God forbid that I should hold you back," said the constable. "But I fear for you in my heart. At least let me give you men to guide you in the mountains."

Silvain smiled.

"Why, sir, they would trust me no more than you do. I must be my own guide and fight my own fight."

"God be with you in all," said the constable, and Silvain asked for his bed.

The room in the tower which they were given had no lock nor bolt on the door. Messire Thibaut, assuring himself of this, said that it was a hard world for poor men and laid himself down across the doorway on the stones. But Silvain put off his breastplate and knelt in the moonlight and said his prayers.

He was on his knees still, though Thibaut had been snoring some while, when the door moved. Thibaut came to his feet from sleep in one snaky movement and stood aside, his dagger in his hand.

The door opened. One creature came in, so small that Thibaut, grasping at it, gripped only clothes.

"Holy Mother!" he gasped. "It is the ghost, my lord."

"It is a woman, Sir Silvain," said Renée. "Are you a man?"

Silvain rose from his knees.

"By God's will, lady."

"Then you are made to serve me."

"I am the servant of all women."

She laughed.

"A dread fellow. Here is but one woman this night. What will you do for me?"

"I kiss your hand and ask your will."

"He asks! Come, sir, here is a venture for you."

She held by his hands and drew close.

"I have need of a knight, Silvain."

"And I ride to win honor. Where is it, lady?"

"I am a prisoner here. This man, the constable, holds me in ward by no right nor will of mine. He served my father, and when my father died he took all and holds me, too, lest I should marry and claim my inheritance. I am kept here in the castle; I may not go beyond the walls, and there is none to help me."

"By my faith, this shall not endure," Silvain said. "I will do you right, Lady Renée."

"There is a man here," she said and kissed him. "Set me free, Silvain."

"My life upon it. Fear no more."

She held to him. "Good faith, I fear nothing. Carry me off, Silvain. I lie in your hand."

"Trust me yet. I will do my errand and come again."

"Wait! You bid me wait?"

She thrust him away.

"Oh, this is knightly! He called you a knight errant, did not he? Yes, you are such a knight as he would praise."

"Lady, I never failed man nor woman yet. And you I will not fail. But I am bound in honor to this venture till it is done."

"Fie! What is it then, your brave venture?"

"I go to take the Wolf of the Mountain."

"You——"

She broke out laughing.

"Oh, the poor man!"

She made a noise like a bleating sheep and ran away.

IN THE morning the constable was as eager that they should be gone as Silvain. He had food and wine ready for their saddle-bags; their horses were at the door when they went in to breakfast; he wished them God-speed before they had done eating, his big face was all asmile as he watched them mount and ride away.

The gate of his castle clanged behind them.

"There is one who is happy to see us go," said Thibaut. "I would give a ha'penny to know what is behind that toothy smile."

"Or behind that shut gate," said Silvain with his head half-turned, for he seemed to hear movement of horses and men. "Ride slowly, brother. There are others who see us go. They watched from the walls. Do not look back. Slowly and make for cover there."

The castle of Le Monêtier stood on a knoll of rock in the midst of the wide valley. The road was down by the river. Away toward the mountains, the valley narrowed quickly where a wooded gorge came into it. On that wood Silvain set his eyes.

But a cry came from the castle:

"Silvain! For the love of your mother! Silvain!"

A blue sleeve came from a window; a golden scarf streamed on the wind.

"Hear nothing, see nothing, my lord," Thibaut cried. "It is a trick and a trap."

"But it is a woman," said Silvain; and he sprang from his horse and climbed the rock to the foot of the castle wall.

The blue mantle leaned out of the window above him; the little face looked down, and he saw it pale with wide, wild eyes.

"Silvain, save me! He knows that I came to you. He has shut me up here. He threatens me. My God, I do not know what he has for me. He swears I shall trouble no man more."

"Then he lies indeed." Silvain smiled. "I am here, lady."

"Holy Mother, what can you do?"

Silvain measured the window and the fall from the window with his eyes.

"I can do nothing unless you trust me," he said. "Come."

"You have said it at last," she cried and knelt in the window and cast herself down, a shred of blue in the air.

He caught her, tossed her up on his shoulder and ran down to the road.

On the castle wall men were shouting.

"This is what he had not thought of," the little woman laughed.

"I wonder, " Silvain said.

They came to the horses, and he swung her up beside Messire Thibaut. She made a face, but slipped her arm round that lanky body and cried—

"Forward, good fellow; forward."

"Make for the wood, brother," Silvain said. "Ride, ride!"

"No safety there, lord. Carry her to Briançon."

"We can never win through. Ride on, and ride hard."

Already the castle gate was opening. Thibaut saw it and groaned and set his horse going. Down the valley indeed was no safety. The constable's men were riding out of the castle and must catch them if they turned. Thibaut drove his horse on and came out of the valley into the wooded gorge; and Silvain followed him, going easily.

The track up the gorge was broken and scarred but wide enough, made for the hauling of timber. It rose high above the torrent, then wound down to cross by a wooden bridge where the water roared between sheer cliffs. Thibaut, who had no head for such work, took his horse over cautiously and could make little speed on the steep climb beyond.

Silvain came after headlong, and as he thundered across the bridge found the planks loosen. He hardly saved a fall. He flung himself from the saddle and tied his frightened horse to a tree and ran back to the bridge. One plank was out of place. He tore it up and used it for a lever to prize up the others and as they yielded, thrust them down into the torrent.

The first of the constable's men, charging on as fast as he down that winding track, came suddenly upon a gulf spanned only by one plank here and another there. They could not hold their horses; they crashed down on the rocks and the wild water before they knew it and others went after them while through the din Silvain labored methodically to break the last planks away. He made an end of that bridge and rode away gentling his horse, leaving ghastly havoc in the depths of the ravine.

"Alas, poor souls, that is an ill lord to serve," said he and said a prayer for the dead.

The track climbed up through the wood. He made what pace he could and in a while saw the Lady Renée in Thibaut's saddle alone, for Messire Thibaut trudged beside, his head over his shoulder, a gloomy man.

"If two people ride a horse, one must ride behind," Thibaut croaked. "That is what she will not learn, lord."

"He rides like a sack, and a sack of bones," said she. "Take me with you, Silvain."

"He is the lighter man."

"Fie, your horse carries you in your armor. I will be sworn I do not weigh so much. You know it. Take me up and I will be armor for you."

For Silvain wore only helmet and breastplate on this venture.

"Good faith, you would stop steel well, little one," Silvain laughed. "And I should have high honor in that. Mount and ride, brother. We are too slow."

"What, are they close upon us yet?" Renée cried. "I thought you had set them on a false scent."

"There is only the torrent between us,"

Silvain said and told her what he had done.

"Oh, noble!" she cried. "You do not know fear. One against all that company! That was well fought, Silvain."

"Pity them, lady," said Silvain sadly. "They ride for a bad captain. I have no honor in it."

"I am weary of your honor," she snapped at him.

"As the fox said to the watch-dog," quoth Thibaut and set her behind his saddle and mounted again and looked at his master. "Where now, lord? For I think this way goes nowhere."

"There is a top to everything," Silvain said and waved him on.

It had become hard to tell which was track and which was hillside. Plainly the thing was cut only to bring down timber, and where the good trees yielded to stone-pines and stones the road ceased to be. Thibaut kept his horse breasting the slope, but he pushed his iron cap askew and scratched his head, disgusting thereby the little woman behind him.

"There is a top to everything," he repeated, "as the rat said when he ran up the chimney. And what will I do when I get there?"

The top was not far off; but they found it a narrow ridge, from which they looked down into a gorge the very twin of that from which they had come, steep and narrow and wooded.

"Now are we up; but where are we?" Thibaut groaned, and Silvain took his bearings and frowned.

To go up and down across such ravines as these must wear them out yet bring them but a little way from Le Monêtier. Yet if they kept high they might come upon crags where no horse could move.

To his perplexities the little woman spoke softly.

"So these two poor babes were lost in the wood. And they laid themselves down and slept; and the robins came and covered them with leaves, and they woke no more, pretty souls. And that is the end of the story, my Silvain. Come, my dear, do not be proud. Ask me to help you."

"Of your grace, Lady Renée," he smiled.

"Fie, you think women are for nothing but worship. I am the best man of us three. Look now, I will find your way for you. I know this land as I know my bed. Where will you go?"

"I must bring you safe to the governor at Briançon. But I dare not take you down the valley here, or we shall come into the constable's hand again."

"To Briançon?" she laughed. "Oh, I am content. We must keep high then by the Alp Benoit and the Pass of the Black Rock and round by the Pass of Buffère and so down to the valley again below the constable's marches. And when you have brought me to Briançon—why then you may go hunt your Wolf."

Silvain looked at her with respect.

"You are sure of yourself," he said. "Lead on."

"Oh, your Wolf shall not have long to wait. Trust me."

She led them along the ridge toward the mountains. It was rough going; and even when they came out of the pines to open ground there were so many boulders, so many holes hidden among the little Alpine rhododendrons, that they had hard work with their horses. But the slope was gentle; she knew how to avoid the ravines; she set them, it was plain, as easy a course as a man could find in that country. What she said they would find, scree or rock, pasture or scrub, broken ground or level, that they did find; and though she went on many detours she never forgot her directions and still worked round on the circuit back to the valley.

"You have an eye for country, Lady Renée."

"I have roamed every mile of this with my father," she said quickly. "Good days! Oh, Silvain, judge how I have pined, shut in the castle!"

"That is over by the grace of God."

"And the kind Silvain. How I thank you, my dear! Good faith, if I have my will I shall live upon the mountains."

Then Messire Thibaut groaned.

"Life is good here," Silvain smiled at her.

Thibaut looked at him with a face of fear.

She laughed.

"Shall we be king and queen of the mountains, Silvain?"

They had climbed high; they were working round the shoulder of the Alp Benoit, seven thousand feet up, and looked down upon a slope too steep to ride.

"There is the Pass of the Black Rock."

She pointed to a great comb on the right. They made for water and ate and lay down to sleep in the twilight.

COLD waked them before dawn. It was a silent company that mounted as the sun rose over the white crags of Italy. But the little woman's head was clear enough, though her cheeks were blue as her mantle, and she led them on till she made out a stream to the south and cried out:

"See! We are coming to the Pass of Buffère."

It was a narrow gateway between two masses of rock. The way down to it lay over a steep, rock-strewn slope. They went afoot, and she flitted on ahead of the men with their stumbling horses till she was so far way that Silvain shouted at her. She waved her hand to him and laughed and went on. Then he gave both horses to the wretched Thibaut and ran after her.

"You are too bold, lady. Who knows what is beyond that gate?'

"Oh, wise Silvain! A careful man are you. Be comforted. You shall go first, and I will wait till you have searched the Pass."

She laughed and sat herself down on the mountainside.

So he went on alone. When he was in the pass two men leaped out of the rocks upon him and cried:

"Stand! Who are you that come by the Pass of Buffère?"

He drew back hand on his sword and looked them over. They were not like the constable's men; they were lean fellows, burned brown as the rock, clad in rough leather, mountain-folk to the eye, shepherds or herdsmen. But they carried swords. He heard a whistle from the rocks above. He saw men coming up.

"Tell me who you are that hold the pass against me," he said. "There are more of you than of me."

"That is well thought of," one of them laughed. "We serve the Wolf, friend."

"This is a good day, brother." Silvain laughed too. "Bring me to your Wolf, for it is he I seek."

But while he spoke men came plunging down the rocks above them, and one who led them shouted, and at the sound others rose running into sight from below. This leader leaped down where Silvain stood in the pass and cried out—

"Do him no hurt; he is welcome."

"This is courtesy, my Lord Wolf."

Silvain bowed and dropped his vizor and drew his sword.

"——, what would you have?"

The leader checked and stared at him.

"You have sought me, and here I am."

He was a young man and lean and lithe. He wore a coat of chain mail, and there was a sword at his side, but he had no helmet. He cocked his cap over one insolent eye; he was as pleased with himself as a bantam.

"I have an errand to you, Sir Wolf," said Silvain.

"A good errand, by my faith, and I thank you well."

"Spoken like a knight. Walk apart with me, I pray you."

"Time enough, friend. There is a lady waits for me," the Wolf replied.

"But it is not so. Now is my time and yours, my Lord Wolf. Come, will you yield yourself or try your fortune against me?"

"Yield? What madman are you?"

He laughed and looked round at his men, for he had half a score behind him.

"Hold him fast, lads, till I bring the lady in."

But Silvain stood in the narrow mouth of the pass.

"She is not for you," he said and shouted: "Thibaut, brother Thibaut, my horse for her. Mount, lady; mount and ride."

Then the men ran upon him, roaring—

" 'Ware Wolf, 'ware Wolf!"

He held his ground, though many swords beat at him and some came home on head and breast. His mail was proof, but the weight of the blows was heavy upon him. Still, though he reeled he kept the gate, for the unarmored men were wary of his sweeping sword and would leap in and out again rather than come upon him together and risk themselves to hew him down. But the fight went hard and he had no hope but to hold them till the little woman could ride off into safety.

"A careful lord you have," he panted. "Where is he, this Wolf, who will not fight his own fight? He lurks; he flinches. Try it man to man, Sir Wolf. I am here for you and none other. But you shun the challenge."

"——, stand aside, lads."

The leader rushed in.

He had no chance to prove himself. Renée came into the fight. Breathless and laughing, she arrived and flung her arms about Silvain and cried out—

"Gaston, Gaston, do not strike."

The poor man was checked with his sword in the air, a queer thing to see.

But Silvain was not amused. Silvain whirled round with her and plucked her arms loose.

"——, you ruin us all, child!" he muttered. "Away with you. Ride for your honor; ride. It is the Wolf himself."

"My God, do I not know him!" she cried and quit Silvain to fling herself upon the Wolf's breast.

He took her heartily and, holding her to him, "Well, sir," he laughed, "we can do no more now, neither you nor I. But I pray you let us come to it again."

"Oh, silly," said Renée. "Never; do you hear me? Never! He is an angel."

"I believe it, darling. Sir, go to heaven."

"Pray, sir, help me there. I am Silvain de St. Lo, a knight of Normandy who have come far to seek you and it is in my mind that you flinched from my challenge."

"I am Gaston de Fontenil and no knight, But I will meet you afoot or on horse, armed or naked."

The little woman crowed like a cock.

"You are two silly fellows," said she. "But by my faith, you shall not fight."

The two men looked at each other over her head and smiled.

"Sir, you command here. At your leisure," said Silvain.

"I thank you for this courtesy," said Gaston. "Come, Renée."

"I will not come. Gaston! That man there took me out of the hands of the constable and beat off a horde of the constable's men, and he has had me at his will a day and a night in the mountains and brought me to you in safety and honor. Say then, are you bound to him?"

"I am bound," Gaston said. "Sir, do me right. I can not fight against you. I am your man."

"Not so, by my faith," Silvain cried. "You owe me nothing, friend. For what I did was not to serve you. I ride to kill you."

"And you bring me my true love," Gaston said.

"Not by my will," said Silvain so sadly that the little woman broke out laughing.

"Not by your will! My dear, you have done nothing by your will this long while. Or where should I be this day? You know what you do, Silvain."

"Good faith, who does? I think none of us knew how this would fall."

"A true word!" Gaston laughed.

"Oh, silly! Did I not?"

Renée pinched him.

"Faith, you are as wise as you are high," says he. "Well, sir, come to dinner."

"How shall I eat your bread?" said Silvain sadly.

"Why, you have given me a wife. ——, I may give you a dinner. Simple enough both, alas, but by my faith I think they be wholesome."

"Sir, did you say simple?" Silvain asked, contemplating Renée.

Into the mouth of the pass came the mournful countenance of Thibaut.

"Is it peace, lord?" he said in a hollow voice.

"Indeed, brother, I have no hope of it," said Silvain. "See!" and he pointed to Renée on her Gaston's arm.

Thibaut shook his head.

"God have mercy upon them," he said and cheered up marvelously. "Let us give thanks for our deliverance, lord."

"They are merry, are not they?" said Renée. "But I think the laugh is ours. Come, where is your dinner, Gaston?"

And over that dinner of salt beef and rye bread in the cave below the pass she told him her adventures.

"So the brave knight who came to kill the Wolf carried me straight into the Wolf's mouth. Oh, the wise Silvain! He thought he was taking me to his governor at Briançon, and I was a good girl and guided him meekly. Do I not know the mountains, Silvain? Gaston has had his lair by the Pass of Buffère many a day."

"I am afraid of this wife of mine, Silvain," Gaston said and put his arm round her and laughed loud.

"I wonder," Silvain said.

Gaston checked his laughter.

"What do you wonder? This is all true, by my faith."

"I wonder many things, my friend. I wonder why the constable told me you lurked on the other side of the valley."

"The constable is a cunning, treacherous knave."

"But I wonder why he would not have you hunted. I wonder who you are."

"By my faith, you have a right to that," Gaston cried and told his story.

He was the son of a poor knight who held land at Fontenil, in the valley, of Renée's father, the old Constable of Le Monêtier. When he grew up he went out to seek fortune, fighting in Italy. He was serving the

Duke of Milan, and word came to him that his father was dead, and he made for home and Renée. But before he was back in the valley her father died also, and the new constable held the tower at Fontenil and the land and drove him away. Then he took to the mountains and gathered men about him and harried the constable's farms.

"This is his beef that you eat and his wine you drink. And so they call me the Wolf of the Mountain."

"Is it only his goods you live upon, Sir Wolf?" Silvain said.

Gaston flushed.

"I am no thief, sir. I take what is mine. There is no man in the land but the constable and his knaves suffers by me."

"And yet he would have sent me astray when I came to take you," Silvain said. "And here you lie and the Lady Renée knows your lair. Does he not know it that he does not hunt you out?"

"Holy Cross, can I tell you what the knave knows?" Gaston cried. "He is dark and deep as ——."

Silvain lay back against the rocks and smiled to himself and looked out of the cave through the sunlight to the far horizon, which was a way of his. But it did not please Gaston, who asked him angrily if he was wondering still.

"Many things yet, brother," Silvain said, "for I am a simple man."

So that dinner began to go awkwardly, and the little woman was forcing laughter about nothing and Gaston muttering to her and fidgeting when a man ran in crying alarm.

"Sir, sir, there are men marching against us, a great company."

GASTON sprang up and made for the lookout place on the crags above the pass.

"And this is one of the things I wondered," Silvain said softly and followed him.

A column was moving along the shoulder of the mountain, some few on horseback, the others afoot, archers and spearmen. But Gaston laughed.

"Let them come. We can hold this against them till they are spent," and he shouted his men to arms.

Silvain touched his shoulder.

"You have a back as well as a front," he said.

Gaston turned. On that other side of the pass the ground was easier, a great bowl of pasture land out of which a track like a spout led down to the valley. Across the open pasture a line of horsemen was stretched far and working on toward the pass like a long drag-net. Gaston swore.

"The cursed rogue! Here is a foul trap. Saddle and ride, lads."

"These be the constable's men?"

"—— doubt them. See, there he rides in their midst."

"So at last he has come to seek you," Silvain smiled.

Gaston swore.

"Aye, now that I have Renée. That rouses him. A cruel fiend is he. ——, I will hold her against him still. Look to yourself, sir. This is no quarrel of yours."

Silvain laughed.

"Sir, it is in my mind that I have made it," he said gently. "I abide to the end. Tell me, where will you ride?"

"Charge through them to the valley. There is no other help."

"Yet that is what they will look for. Ride first on that track which climbs to the sheepfold."

"Why, that will take us up among the crags and——"

"It will take us nowhere indeed. But they must gather to meet us. Then we turn aside and slip them and break for the valley."

Gaston stared at him.

"You have fought many a fight."

"But this is the happiest," Silvain laughed.

"There are some of us will go down."

"They will die well."

"Sir, if I fall, do not fail my lady."

"My honor is her honor," Silvain said.

They leaped down from the rocks where Renée stood gazing up at them, still and white; and, holding each a hand of hers, they hurried her to the horses.

Then, riding in close order, their little company made for the high ground. The long line of the constable's horsemen, seeing them choose that unexpected way, fell into some confusion in haste to meet them; and the constable was loud and angry. But he gathered a strong mass against them, and the rest of the line worked round to take them in flank.

"Hold on yet," Silvain said, measuring ground and pace.

The constable's mass was going the faster; the clash was near.

"Now by the right; now! Keep close and ride hard."

They turned sharp and rode at the thin line on their flanks. It closed to take the shock; but the ranks it made were weak.

Silvain and his company crashed upon it and broke through, not without wounds on their unarmored bodies. Then Silvain drew aside from the front and let all go by.

"Ride hard!" he cried. "You lead them now. Ride hard!"

The constable's mass was out of hand. Under his raging orders it checked and was scattered as some halted and some tried to turn. But he sent it on in a wild pursuit. Soon the bolder men or the better mounted were drawing near. Silvain, riding easily, turned on a sudden against the first of them, struck down one man and another unawares and turned again and galloped after Gaston and his company. To Gaston's side he thrust his horse.

"Here is a hard chase, sir. He will follow us far. Carry your lady to Briançon and say to the governor that Silvain de St. Lo sent you and tell your tale."

"But you, Silvain?" the little woman cried.

Silvain laughed.

"Be happy, lady, for happy am I this day," and he reined up his horse and let them go by and rode easily, a rear-guard of one, and as he rode he sang a Latin hymn.

All across the pasture the constable's men were spread in pursuit; and some, riding hard, made across to cut off the fugitives where the high ground closed in again and left only a narrow space for the road to the valley. Silvain chose his own line and sat down in the saddle and sent his horse on. He crashed upon those venturous riders and bore one down and thundered on in a running fight with three more till only one was left and he had no more heart for it and drew off. So Gaston and his company came safe out of the pastures to the road.

But before Silvain could reach it others of the constable's men were in front of him, and he was left alone between those enemies and the main body which the constable brought on behind with a torrent of oaths.

Gaston looked back and saw his plight and checked and turned, but he rose in his stirrups shouting:

"Ride on; ride on! I hold them at my will."

From behind the constable was roaring to the men in front that they must come back and cut him down.

"Fools, fools, make sure of him, or you lose all."

The constable's voice cracked in his passion.

"Down with him! If he breaks through we are dead men."

Silvain laughed.

"Too late; too late," he called. "Dead are you already and know it not."

But he rode warily, keeping his distance from the men behind, closing on the men in front no more than he must.

Their minds were divided; they checked and faltered and chose at last to obey their master and turned on Silvain. Then Messire Thibaut, who had been riding with his head over his shoulder as his way was, pulled his horse aside and fitted a bolt to his cross-bow. He shot and shot again.

Before they reached Silvain two men went down. That gave him room. He charged at the others, swerved from the shock and as they went by swept a backward blow at a man's loins and galloped on to Thibaut, who sat his horse shooting as fast as he could work his bow.

"Good thanks, brother. Spare your bolts. We shall need all yet. Ride, ride!"

They galloped on together. There was need. The constable had put something of his own fear into his men, and they drove their horses hard.

The chase roared on in the twilight. Once and again Silvain turned to charge men who pressed too near; once and again Thibaut halted and shot. So they made mile after mile and drew near the main road above Briançon, and Gaston was safe away. But Silvain's horse had wounds in neck and chest, and both were failing, and behind them the constable raged nearer.

"Pray God for dark," Thibaut groaned.

They were riding through tilled land which had no cover for them; and beyond, the valley lay wide in the evening mist.

A light broke out against the sky, the beacon which glowed every night above the gate of Briançon.

"Look well, constable; look well," Silvain shouted. "There is Briançon."

"The devil burn you, you shall never be there," the constable roared.

"But he is there," Silvain laughed. "Gaston is there and tells his tale. A Wolf! A Wolf!"

He reined his failing horse close to Thibaut and muttered:

"On, brother; on. Turn by the trees there and shoot. This is the last throw."

The constable was almost upon him. Silvain flung himself from his spent horse, sword in hand.

"Rot you in ——, I have you now," the constable roared and made at him to ride him down.

He sprang to the constable's left; and so, compelling an awkward back-hand blow at him, he slipped under it and thrust upward beneath the breastplate. The constable was dragged from the saddle screaming, and he rolled and writhed in the dust under the horses of his men.

"Your lord is down and dead," Silvain shouted. "Broken men are you this night."

And Thibaut's arrows began to beat upon them.

"Who dies for him now? Of your grace give him company where he is gone. Wait yet a little and the governor will come from Briançon and hang you all."

And he darted hither and thither among them, striking wherever he could drive home his sword. That wild attack brought confusion. They struck at him and struck each other, and with the cross-bow bolts scourging them and his sword searing in the dusk could not tell what smote them.

"Your lord is dead," Silvain roared. "Who dies for him?"

Their hearts went out of them. They broke and fled.

Messire Thibaut, coming back gingerly, found horses without riders and a mess of men's bodies on the road.

"God have mercy upon us, are you dead?" Thibaut groaned.

"Not if you have water, brother," Silvain panted.

He had flung himself down; he lay arms wide like a man crucified, all his body heaving. . . .

IN THE hall of the castle at Briançon Gaston and his company stood before the governor.

"You asked for me, and here am I," the governor said, and his red brow puckered as he looked from the man to the little woman. "Who are you that come to Briançon crying alarms?"

"I am Gaston de Fontenil. Men call me the Wolf of the Mountain. And——"

"Do they so? You are a bold man, Gaston."

"And Sir Silvain de St. Lo bade me ride to you and ask justice. But——"

The governor laughed loud.

"Well said, Silvain! My Wolf, you shall have justice to your heart's desire. Go, some of you, bring Master Cosimo."

"Sir, for the love of God, waste no more time. Send out a company on the road to Le Monêtier. I asked them at the gate; I asked them here at the castle; but they would bring me first to you. And all this while your good knight Sir Silvain rides in peril."

"Then a happy man is he. Care not for him, my Wolf. You have your own cares. Ha, Master Cosimo! Your Wolf is caught. Look; here he is, and his pack."

The old merchant came slowly and looked into each man's face.

"Here be none that I know, my lord," he said at last. "Their blood must not be shed for me. Find me the band which set on me and I will swear to many a man."

"They are strewn along the valley, Master Cosimo," a hoarse voice cried.

Dirt and blood from head to heel, Silvain came up the hall.

"My lord, I have done my deed. I have sent you the Wolf alive. I pray you, do him right."

"Why, man, what Wolf is this? No wild beast he. You did not get all that blood in taking him."

"Why, no, my lord. He is not the only Wolf in your Mountains. Come and see."

He strode out into the courtyard. There men with lanterns stood curious about a horse on which a man's body was bound.

"I have brought the Wolf dead, my lord. I have done my deed," Silvain said.

The governor looked long.

"It is the constable, by my faith," he said, and he chuckled.

"So it is," Thibaut croaked; "so it was, and so it will be. Many a sheep-dog lives upon mutton and gives the wolves the blame of the bones.

"Oh, wise man!"

The governor poked at him.

"And when did you learn that, my Silvain?" he laughed. "Come in, man, and tell your tale."

"It is ill talk between one who is full and one who is fasting," Thibaut groaned, "as the calf said to the cow at milk-time."

"This tale is not mine," Silvain said. "Let the Wolf tell it, my lord."

The governor thrust them back into the hall, and he cried to Gaston—

"Speak, my Wolf; it is your turn."

So Gaston at last began at the beginning; how the constable had robbed him of his inheritance and denied him his bride, and how he had harried the constable's land till the peasants called him the Wolf of the Mountain.

"But never he harried you," the governor chuckled.

"Sir, his men ever fled from me."

"—— doubt them."

"And none had hurt of me but him and his."

"Still, he spared you. Oh, the merciful man!"

The governor put his elbow into Silvain's ribs.

"What did I say, Silvain? This Wolf was worth a king's revenue to Master Constable. Who would not pay for a guard against the Wolf, the Wolf who stripped them bare?"

"My lord—" Gaston flushed—"if honest men have been robbed on the mountains, I swear by the Cross it is no work of mine."

"Tell your tale, Wolf; tell your tale."

So Gaston told how Silvain had come to him and challenged him and brought him Renée; how the constable had come upon them with all his men and how Silvain had fought that long running fight.

The governor nudged Silvain, chuckling. "It is your turn. Tell on."

"All is told, my lord."

"——, I will have the story of that fight out of you if I sit till dawn. But tell me now, when did your wisdom guess our constable was the Wolf to kill?"

"Sir, it came into my mind while he talked to me, for I could not love him. But I would not believe it lest I did him wrong. Yet it came back to me, and I wondered. And at the last, when I saw among his men men who had attacked Master Cosimo, then I knew. God have mercy upon him."

The governor laughed loud.

"God save you, Silvain, you have a simple soul."

"Alas, my lord, I do not love to think men knaves. But tell me in your turn, when you sent me forth with the constable to catch your Wolf, what did you know?"

Bloodshot eyes twinkled.

"Alas, my Silvain, I have lived some while in this world. Bear me no malice, lad. You shall not need."

"By my faith, there is only thanks in my heart. For this was a rare rich venture."

"You shall say so, by my faith. Let him that killed the Wolf wear the skin. I will have you for constable in Le Monêtier."

The little woman clapped her hands and cried—

"Silvain!"

Silvain rose and knelt before the governor.

"I pray you, my lord, let it be his. For it was her father's, and he knows your land and is true. But I must go my way, so am I made."

"God have mercy, what do you seek?"

"My lord, I ride to win honor and fortune."

The governor stared at him.

"A greedy man are you, Silvain, my son," he said. "And proud—proud as the good God."

But Messire Thibaut was heard to groan.

"Merry we live and merry we die," he croaked. "And alackaday, there is no wine to cheer us."

Whereat the governor started up and roared for supper.

The CAMP-FIRE

A free-to-all meeting place for readers, writers and adventurers

Our Camp-Fire came into being May 5, 1912, with our June issue, and since then its fire has never died down. Many have gathered about it and they are of all classes and degrees, high and low, rich and poor, adventurers and stay-at-homes, and from all parts of the earth. Some whose voices we used to know have taken the Long Trail and are heard no more, but they are still memories among us, and new voices are heard, and welcomed.

We are drawn together by a common liking for the strong, clean things of out-of-doors, for word from the earth's far places, for man in action instead of caged by circumstance. The *spirit* of adventure lives in all men; the rest is chance.

But something besides a common interest holds us together. Somehow a real comradeship has grown up among us. Men can not thus meet and talk together without growing into friendlier relations; many a time does one of us come to the rest for facts and guidance; many a close personal friendship has our Camp-Fire built up between two men who had never met; often has it proved an open sesame between strangers in a far land.

Perhaps our Camp-Fire is even a little more. Perhaps it is a bit of leaven working gently among those of different station toward the fuller and more human understanding and sympathy that will some day bring to man the real democracy and brotherhood he seeks. Few indeed are the agencies that bring together on a friendly footing so many and such great extremes as here. And we are numbered by the hundred thousand now.

If you are come to our Camp-Fire for the first time and find you like the things we like, join us and find yourself very welcome. There is no obligation except ordinary manliness, no forms or ceremonies, no dues, no officers, no anything except men and women gathered for interest and friendliness. Your desire to join makes you a member.

YES, I'll say this newspaper man got quite a number of things mixed up. Can some one tell Mr. Rall and the rest of us the real facts if there were any?

Gravelbourg, Saskatchewan.

Am enclosing a clipping—I know that newspaper men usually get things mixed up pretty badly. I suppose he meant San Blas Indians instead of Javiros, but I didn't think San Blas were head-hunters. I wonder if any one at Camp-Fire knows the facts about this bet.

I am not enough of an adventurer to speak at Camp-Fire; still, I like to sit in the background and listen to the yarns.—JAMES RALL.

OTTAWA, Sept. 27.—After finishing a 9,714-mile walking tour with success, P. J. MacDonald, of Vancouver, and better known throughout the world as "the walking Scotsman," arrived in the city last night for a few days' rest before leaving for England. In London, last October, W. H. Howard, multi-millionaire of the Argentine, made a bet with Sir George Newnes, publisher of *Wide World* Magazine, that no white man could walk from Panama through the head hunters' district of Javiros, Colombia, South America.

There was no stated time set for the man to cover the distance and the stake was $37,500. Mr. MacDonald successfully hung up a world's record of walking 58 miles a day and won the bet for Sir George Newnes. He left Ottawa last November and is today back in the capital after walking to Callao, Colombia.

YES, lots take this view of it—"nothing ever happened"—"no adventure"—"no excitement." Yet somehow there seems to be enough "kick" to it to keep them going right along after more of the same.

Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Re the debate on what is adventure? How's this: "It is something outside your usual line that gives you a kick."

I have hiked through the mountains on the west coast, through the trail from Forks to Alleum Bay and around through the Olympic Mountains. Paddled a canoe through the North country in Canada. Went through the war. Nothing ever happened. Have shot big game but don't think of any kick I got out of it. The worst enemies a man has in a new country are bugs, bad water and poor food. Most of the real hard-boiled bad actors are dead or in the movies and no animal in this country has any chance against a repeating rifle, even the grizzly, though I imagine the old timers with their muzzle-loading pea-guns got some fun out of him.

Talk to any of the other boys who have roamed around a bit; the high spots in their lives are not what happened on the trail or ship, but the girl they had at this town, the big game or time at another and in between is just work. Get me?—JAMES HATHAWAY.

THE following are only bits taken here and there out of a letter from Gordon Young to me in connection with his serial in this issue. I take the liberty of passing it on to you because I'd like to turn it into a kind of challenge.

If this is the kind of story you call a "love story," stand up and say so. It surely is not the "gingerbread" variety of love story. *Adventure* bars the latter kind, and the love element in general plays, as you know, a very minor rôle in our pages; but woman exists, the most hardened adventurer of you all will not deny her tremendous influence on man, and that influence is not barred from our magazine.

If the above sounds like a "defense" or like an apology for our printing this story, let me nip that idea in the bud. It is, as I said, a challenge. Read the story and then if there are any of those really knowing life in the rough who feel that this isn't "our kind of story," let's hear from them. At least they'll not be able to say there isn't plenty of man-interest in it. Or of action.

It isn't our magazine's custom to praise its own stories, but—well, read for yourself.

All I was really interested in was to tell as good a story as I could about men who were embittered toward women and yet—*Heddon* being the protagonist—would suffer every hardship and display great courage in the defense and protection of women, and in spite of everything be caught in the ache of hunger; also, in a spirit of irony, and truthfulness to Life, I wanted . . . . That, I know, is true to life. Having the theme I was interested only in illustrating woman-hunger from a variety of angles, through many characters. I knew that I was on very thin and slippery ice in trying to write such a story for *Adventure*, which bars love; but I felt sure that I had told an *Adventure* story, one that would appeal to those readers who are really adventurers, men who know the bitterness of life and have gone into the lonely places. I believe very strongly that one reason *Adventure* readers resent the usual love story is because they, as a class, or at least among your readers there is the class, that have endured bitterness and know the falsity of gingerbread romance.

LAST night I came back from a trip into a once riotous but now nearly deserted placer district. I was up there partly after trout, partly after material for a story I am planning. The streams are still strewn with old miners, running sand and water over their riffles, and there is not *one* woman among them. Some of them are very old. There is tragedy behind almost every one of them; but what I am driving at is this: the ache for woman. *Not Sex*, but the nearly mystic influence of woman presence, and their ache for it. Sex may be and no doubt is the hidden source of the ache, but it is no more to be thought of than when we look at a rose it is necessary to think of the manure fertilizer. "Pearl-Hunger" was written and mailed before I went up there; but everything I saw and learned confirmed what I had deduced from other experiences and put into the story.

I wrote that story not only for *Adventure* but for that special type of adventurer who feels and knows of what I have written.—GORDON YOUNG.

WHERE did the American Indians come from? At present scientists seem to discard the theory of migration from Asia. With no real basis for any opinion whatever on the subject, I cling to the migration theory—which is an amusing example of pig-headed and ignorant opinion. However, I don't know enough on the subject even to be sure I'm wrong and here's a doctor with more knowledge than I who supports the idea:

Waupun, Wisconsin.

I have seen a letter from partner K. W. Mason of Magalia, California, in regard to the origin of the American Indians. His letter is pretty good, but why in the name of the Pink Toed Prophet does he want them to travel so much thataway? Egypt to China, China to Alaska, Alaska to east America. How come? Then to sustain his argument he cited the Bible!

It is probable, if not certain, that the American Indian did not come from Egypt but that in centuries following the glacial era, or even later, tribes started to migrate. It is also very possible that at that particular time Asia and America were not separated by a body of water in the northern part—that is, between Kamchatka and Alaska by the Behring Sea. Then why would it be improbable that a few tribes started on their migration in a northeast direction as later migrations started in a northwest direction?

Furthermore, one of the oldest symbols of the world can be found from Siberia to Ceylon and from Alaska to the Tierra del Fuego, if not in its entirety, always in a recognizable form. I am speaking of the swastika, and we know that the swastika is Asian in its origin.

The features of the Indians are "*not Mongolian*" but Asian. There is no doubt there, and in the eyes of some you find the same characteristics, and also the cheekbones in both are prominent, but not like the Mongolian race. In my estimation and belief the American Indians are of Asiatic origin. Perhaps I am wrong—possibly I am, but unless some one more versed than I am in ethnology will be kind enough to show me, I will believe that I am right!

Come on, somebody. Speak up and let us know what you have to say!—DR. P. ANTHER.

VINEGARONES, hydrophobia skunks, chaparral birds, notched guns, and a greeting from an old-timer. Here's luck to him in the oil game.

Moran, Texas.

Accepting the general invitation to join the Camp-Fire, I would like to reply to some of Mr. Challenger's queries at an earlier Camp-Fire.

AS AN introductory I will say that I, too, have traveled over much of the West, and recently have made my home here in the Southwest. I, too, have known personally many "killers," but I have never made close enough inspection of their weapons to say positively that any of them were notched or that they were not notched. A recent case, of Bud Ballew, Ardmore, Oklahoma, killed in Wichita Falls, Texas, less than a year ago—it is claimed by reliable witnesses his gun had quite a number of notches corresponding with the number of his known killings. I have seen the gun in his hands and in his belt, but did not look for notches. However, I have no doubt the notches were there. Such notches are but in keeping with the character of most men of that kind.

Mind, I do not say all "killers." Some of these men are proud to be in the limelight as being handy with a gun, and for such men it would be the natural thing to notch their guns or do anything that would make for more publicity. Probably I have seen as many gun men as has Mr. Challenger, and I admit I have seen nothing of the notches, except on some dead bandit's guns which were on exhibition, and I do not consider such evidence as entirely reliable, for in that case the notches may have been added by the exhibitor.

I WAS at Dodge City, Kansas, when Bat Masterson was city marshal there; I personally knew Jim Gainsford, one time deputy under Wild Bill Hickok; I knew Fly Speck Sam, of Abilene, and many other gun men of the '70s. You see I am no Spring chicken. Candidly, it never occurred to me to ask any of these men to show me the notches on their guns. Still, I believe some of them were notched.

As to hydrophobia skunks I am skeptical; and yet I have talked with men who declared they knew personally of cases of death from skunk bites, and I certainly would hesitate long before calling one of these men a liar. In fact, I know they believe the hydrophobia skunk to be the real thing.

As to the road runner (chaparral bird) imprisoning its snake victim with cactus thorns, even though Mr. Challenger and myself have never caught him in the act, he is a shy bird, and I prefer to let some work on natural history settle that point.

I HAVE seen several so-called vinegarones. Am not much good at description, but will say they looked to be built somewhat on the order of a centipede, but are much larger than any centipede I ever saw; the color is deep black merging into a reddish shade on under side and extremity of claws; they seem to be covered with a hard horny shell and the claws look to be very strong and sharp. I do not pretend to know what the true name is, but have seen several specimens at widely separated points, and they were identical and were always called vinegarones. Where or how they got the name I do not know; neither do I know if they are as deadly as reputed. I would not like to have one for a bedfellow, just judging from appearance.

THERE was a time, years ago, when it was hard to make me believe some things I heard. In fact I do not now believe everything I hear; but I have been so thoroughly converted from some of my disbeliefs that I must be mighty sure of my grounds before I will contradict. It is the difference between confident youth and conservative—no, I won't say old age, because I'll not admit to being old, except in years. Well, I'm glad to have met you, Mr. Challenger, and other Camp-Fire members. Am sure we would all enjoy closer acquaintance. I've tried about everything Mr. Challenger has tried, and now I am taking a shy at the oil game. Bet some of you have tried it, too—H. R. PUTNAM.

AND here is another letter in reply to Mr. Challenger:

St. Louis, Missouri,

I see that H. Challenger writes to know if some of the Western tales are myths. My experience ranges from '87 to '06 and I can concur in some of his remarks.

I have never seen a road runner kill a snake except for food, and I know of no case of a human being, horse or cow bitten by a hydrophobic skunk or coyote, yet on the plateaus around Prescott skunks are said to be plentiful. I have seen many skunks in New Mexico and Texas, but never a case of infection. An uncle of mine on the Medina River had a "madstone" which he loaned several times to my knowledge for persons bitten by dogs. It always cured—probably a pebble would have done as well.

I knew two bad men with notches on their guns, but neither would explain their significance. I knew one well enough to ask for details, but got none.

THE vinegarone I know very well. They are said to be common in west Texas but all I have seen were in Arizona in the Graham Mountains near Fort Grant. Gwendolyn Overton gives an excellent description of a vinegarone fight in "The Heritage of Christ" written in and about Fort Grant and San Carlos.

The vinegarone is a larger spider, more elongated than the tarantula and covered with a hard skin or shell of an olive green color. He will fight even a stick poked at him, and in battles with the tarantula is always the favorite. The Mexicans esteem him more deadly than the tarantula, but a close examination shows no poison fangs or sacs. The same is true of the Gila monster and in each case his belligerent disposition has given foundation to his deadly reputation.

THE bite of the tarantula and centipede is serious but not necessarily fatal with medical attention. One's chances are better than ever, under normal circumstances.

The rattlesnake is the one deadly animal. That hogs are apparently immune is due to their fat. Dogs sometimes survive, horses and cattle never, in my experience.

Ambrose Bierce was undoubtedly killed in Mexico, some say by Villa's men in Chihuahua, others in Zacatecas. Villa denied any knowledge of his demise, and I believe him. Cassidy I did not know.—L. R. Baker.

ON THE occasion of his first story in our magazine James Parker Long follows Camp-Fire custom and stands up to introduce himself:

Naples, N. Y.

In your invitation to me to stand up and introduce myself to Camp-Fire you used the words, "Will you follow custom and talk to us, very informally and at your ease?" The first I can do, for informal speech is all I have, but it is asking too much that a man like myself, whose life has followed placid valleys and whose literary endeavors have resulted in a paltry dozen accepted stories, should feel at his ease in the company which exchanges words in the genial warmth of the Camp-Fire, hospitable though it be.

A SKELETON history of my life is quickly given. I was born in Rangoon, Burma, in '89. Since then I have lived in the following places: Union City and Pittsburg, Pennsylvania; Duluth and Minneapolis, Minnesota; attended school in Exeter, N. H. and Cambridge, Mass; sold real estate in Rochester, N. Y. and farmed it in the neighborhood of Naples, N. Y. I have been in the last location for eleven years, ten of which I have been married. We have two extremely active daughters whose size leads me to believe that I am getting along. Our home is a bungalow a third of a mile from the road and set nearly in the middle of our eight hundred acres. In three directions we can see no neighbors—nothing but hills and woods.

I don't know what you would call me. I farm a little, write a little, am at present supervisor of the town of Italy—and just by the way, there is drama in meetings of town boards and boards of supervisors even though there may not be adventure. For recreation I fish a little, the streams of this Finger Lake region are not to be sneezed at for brook and brown trout, and I hunt a little for the bloodthirsty cottontail and the rapacious ring-necked pheasant, and I read what the other fellows have done and written.

ALTHOUGH my own life has been void of adventure it has, happily, been thrown with people who have been more fortunate. My father was a missionary in Burma at the time of the opening of upper Burma and the deposing of Theebaw. (Sounds like a creation of Kipling's, but there was such a man.) He has stories. I wish I had the power to tell them. Among father's friends was Captain Finlay whose clipper burned with him off the coast of Chile. With him went a precious hoard of narratives—narrow escapes, conflicts and achievements. Coincidentally my wife's grandfather and uncle spent a week on a kindly spar in the same latitude and were saved. I know where the spar and the logs of their voyages are and I hope some time to dig into them and glean a small part of the thrills contained within them.

I WAS introduced to the Minnesota woods as a school boy by Captain MacDougal of Duluth. He dated back to the early days of the Northwest and had stories to tell of gold dredging, the opening of the iron ore ranges and the stripping of the pine. Incidentally he was the man who invented the whalebacks, or pigs, that used to ply the lakes.

Some of my trips I will always remember: the race between the B. M. and I. and the D. R. L. and W. to lay the first steel into International Falls; Isle Royale, before the Summer hotels; involuntary baths in the rapids of the Embarass.

The most adventurous persons I have ever known were the lady missionaries. One of them, Charlotte Illingworth, had the unique experience of having a cow picked out of her hands by a hungry tiger.

THIS introduction is getting selfish and taking up more than its share of room. I will take the ax to it and tell you about the story. I have twice seen real bang up stallion fights. I do not think there can be any animal which can put more whole-souled hate and action into a fight than a stud horse. I have always wanted to get the effect of their beautiful savagery on to paper. I know it can not be done, but that does not keep me from trying. I wish I had been alive in 1731 and had a ringside seat at the fight between Godolphin's Arabian and Hobgoblin with the favors of Roxana for the stake. Authorities differ as to the details, but some of the contemporaneous reports describe a glorious affair.

This is all except that I wish to extend the right hand of fellowship to all members of the Camp-Fire. My roots are deeply set in the soil but it is a mighty lowly vegetable, no matter how firmly its roots may hold, which does not stretch some part of it up and peer eagerly at the doings of others.—James Parker Long.

WASN'T a revolver needed here? And, even if Prohibition prohibited, isn't the disrespect for law it engenders a worse thing than liquor to have in our insides? While as to our rotten politicians ——

Aug. 24th, '23.

I have for many years sat around your Camp-Fire and listened in on the many talks there, giving me many a pleasurable, as well as beneficial, hour. May it burn long and may it never burn out.

I CAME across the article, enclosed herewith, in one of our dailies and send it in because it seems to be a very clear case in point, in regard to the so-called "Anti Gun-Toting Law" that has been causing considerable palaver around the fire lately. A respectable citizen and doctor is put at the mercy of a gang of unscrupulous, gun-toting, bootlegging beasts. To my way of thinking, both the Sullivan law and the Prohibition law are two of the biggest farces ever inflicted upon a people. Combined, they have only tended to enlarge an octupus already vile enough. But why go on? If I ever really let loose, I would in all probability be looked up by some of the higher ups and put in jail! God give us, soon, a real man, who fears not to clean out from our fair land the blood-suckers, grafters, rotten politicians who seem to have gotten a grip upon the making and enforcing of our laws. It will need a giant, you can bet on that! Selfishness and the love of the filthy dollar seem to be the keynote, with scant consideration for others and no thought of God at all.—ALEX F. HAGEDORN.

THE clipping follows:

The Department of Justice can not grant Dr. S. W. Soper, manager of two United States Veterans' Bureau hospitals at Perryville, Md., permission to carry a revolver—even to protect his life from members of a vice ring at Havre de Grace who have threatened to kill him.

This was learned yesterday following a conference Tuesday between the Veterans' Bureau and the Department of Justice.

Granting of a temporary post as United States marshal for the Federal park reservation may be one means of solving the situation, it was suggested last night.

Dr. Soper's life was threatened by a gang of bootleggers who objected to his efforts to stamp out liquor selling, immoral houses and dope peddling by a ring which made headquarters at Havre de Grace, just across the river from the Federal reservation.

The threat followed the shooting of one of the hospital patients who had been mistaken for Dr. Soper.

Dr. Soper's request to the Department of Justice for authority to carry a gun was made after a similar plea to Governor Ritchie, of Maryland, had met with failure.

In the meantime, the bootleggers and vice houses are still operating at Perryville, it was asserted by one high Government official yesterday.

A COMRADE tells us how the Nooksack Indian gets his fish:

Seattle, Washington.

Did you ever see a Siwash Indian catch a salmon? He has three ways of doing it—with a gill-net, with a dip-net, and with a gaff-hook. The familiar hook and line of the white man he scorns as being too slow and entailing too much hard work. What the Indian wants is the fish. He cares nothing about the sport of the thing, nor the thrill of landing a twelve-pound beauty with an eight-ounce rod and a slender silk line; leave that to the crazy white man who has nothing else to do. The Indian wants the fish, and the easier he can get them the better he likes it and the more time he has for sleep.

HIS favorite way of catching salmon is by the use of the gill-net, since this method leaves him the maximum amount of time for his previously mentioned sleep. A gill-net is a straight piece of netting about twelve feet long and five or six feet wide. One side has wooden floats and the other heavy leaden weights, so it will hang perpendicular in the water. On either end is a stone anchor to keep it stretched out.

Setting the net is an easy process. He chooses an eddy or a deep pool in the river and floats by in his canoe, with the net piled in the stern. When the proper spot is reached, he kicks one of the anchors overboard. This settles to the bottom of the river and pulls the net out over the stern as the canoe floats leisurely on. When all the net is out of the canoe, he kicks the other anchor overboard and his work is done. His labors over for the day, the Indian wends his way homeward and sinks into repose until the morrow, leaving the net to catch his next meal.

The water of the Nooksack River is never very clear; usually it is muddy. This makes it hard for the salmon to see, and thereby brings about their undoing. They swim around in the eddies and pools in search of food and, if a net is there, they are sure to run into it head-first in the course of a day or two. The meshes of the net are not quite large enough to let an average-sized salmon through. He gets half-way through, and then tries to back out. As he backs out, the meshes of the net catch under his gills and he stays there till the owner of the the net pulls him out.

Next day the Indian comes back in his canoe and pulls the net up, usually finding four or five salmon in it. These he either takes home or hides under a log so he can tell his wife where to find them. With this supply of fish, he betakes himself to rest and does not stir abroad again for a week or so, or until such time as his larder is empty.

THE gill-net requires an initial investment of several dollars, and is liable to be stolen, or carried away by a sudden rise of the river. This makes its ownership somewhat of a risk, so it often happens, through chance or otherwise, that the noble red man finds himself without one and has to take recourse to a dip-net. Fishing with a dip-net is hard work, and is only carried on in time of dire emergency, when fish can not be begged, borrowed or stolen.

A dip-net is a small bag-shaped net hanging from a large hoop at the end of a ten-foot pole. The salmon are always going up-stream, so the Indian takes his stand at the edge of the water, places the net in the water and moves it slowly down-stream in the hope that a salmon will run through the hoop. If the water is muddy and the Indian lucky, a salmon will occasionally run through the hoop and strike the net on the other side. Feeling him strike the net, the fisherman quickly jerks it out of the water and, if he is lucky again, the salmon is still inside it.

Two or three hours of dipping for salmon is considered a good day's work for any man. The Indian, if he is hungry enough, will usually stay till he has two fish. Then he goes home and sends his squaw back to the river to dip for the rest of the night.

A GAFF-HOOK is merely a huge fish-hook on the end of a long, light pole. Catching salmon with this instrument is much easier work than using a dip-net. The operator stands on a log over a deep, quiet pool and feels around in the water with the hook. If there are any salmon in the pool, he will, in the course of time, strike against one of them with the end of the pole. A quick jerk upward and he gets the fish about one time out of five. This method of catching salmon is not very much used, easy as it is, for the reason that deep, quiet pools are few and far between on such a swift river as the Nooksack, and the water has to be excessively muddy so the fish can not see the pole. Gaffing salmon requires a great deal of skill on the part of the operator and is profitable only when the river is full of fish.

I SAID that the Indian had three ways of getting salmon; as a matter of fact, he has four. If it happens to be a cold, rainy morning when Poor Lo discovers his larder to be empty, he doesn't feel inspired to chase down to the river and expose himself to the mercies of the elements. Leave that to the fool white fisherman. Your Indian stays home to keep the fire going and sends his squaw up to the white man's settlement to spend the day washing for whoever may have need of her services. On her way home she stops at the store and spends her day's pay on canned salmon. This is the Indian's favorite way of catching fish.—P. G. COOKE.

A WORD from William Byron Mowery concerning his story in this issue:

Austin, Texas.

"The Blood Trail" is founded upon the fabled trek of the last viking band of Greenland westward and southward in their efforts to get back "home." The Greenlandic colony, as you probably know, was abandoned strangely by the mother colony of Iceland and Norway for several hundred years. When a ship finally did go out, the colony no longer existed. Various guesses have been made about the fate of the Greenlanders. Register mine!—W. BYRON MOWERY.

THE end of Pat Coghlan. And word on other men and events of the Southwest. Written, as you'll note, before Albert B. Fall ceased to be Secretary of the Interior.

Tularosa, New Mexico

In a past issue Mr. Williams of Fort Stockton, Texas, had a letter detailing in part his trip on a prospecting venture, while traveling through the San Andreas and Sacramento Mountains.

In his interesting narrative Mr. Williams touched on the probable end of Pat Coghlan who in the latter '70's was known throughout the Southwest as the King of Tularosa and friend of the notorious outlaw, Billy the Kid.

I WISH to enlighten Mr. Williams and others also, who as readers of *Adventure* read his interesting letter, that both Pat Coghlan and his wife died here and are buried in the cemetery just north of the town. I wish too, to inform Mr. Williams that Mr. Bechdolt in naming the clerk in the Coghlan store made an error. The clerk's name was Morris Wohlgausett, who had been employed in that capacity by Mr. Coghlan's predecessors, the Freundenthal brothers, and who continued in that position when Mr. Coghlan purchased the store about 1876.

The Nesbeth referred to was George Nesbeth who opened up the first sawmill in Tularosa, and sold lumber to Franklin Station, now El Paso, Texas, and the other villages for miles around. He was Pat Coghlan's ranch foreman until differences arose between them, which ended in a lawsuit. The suit was called for trial at Las Cruces, New Mexico, the county seat, and, when Mr. Nesbeth did not appear, it was given to Mr. Coghlan by default. Some time after this an old prospector espied a buggy without any horses attached in a ravine; approaching to investigate he met with a terrible stench and hurried off to Las Cruces and notified the sheriff of his discovery. A posse was quickly got together and hurried out to the scene of the foul odor, where the partially decomposed bodies of Nesbeth and his wife were identified as the occupants of the buggy. The bodies were removed and given burial at Tularosa, and the law started a search for the murderers which finally resulted in the capture of two Mexicans, who were traced through the sale by one of them of Nesbeth's overcoat to a teamster. One of the Mexicans shot himself, the other was hung at Las Cruces. On the gallows with the rope knotted and placed under his left ear, he was asked to identify the man who had hired him and his partner to kill Nesbeth from the vast crowd assembled to witness the execution. Mr. Van Patten, the sheriff of the county, suspecting Coghlan as the guilty party, had him in the front row, but the condemned man glanced past Coghlan and pointed to a man absolutely innocent.

IN CLOSING the long narrative, I will state also that Pat Coghlan died in poverty, a heavy drinker (always in his later years he drank to excess). His general store has passed into the history of the Southwest; the building is now used as a bakery. His handsome two-story adobe home at Three Rivers, about 15 miles north of Tulorosa is owned and used as his residence by the Secretary of the Interior Department, ex-U. S. Senator Albert G. Fall of New Mexico. The wide valley in which the thousands of the King of Tularosa's cattle used to graze is being prospected by oil companies for liquid gold. The grave of his friend, Billy the Kid, is a short distance from old Fort Sumner, where a tombstone without an inscription or a mark to tell to the traveler the mortal remains of the buried one beneath, often attracts the attention of the curious.

Pat Garrett, the noted sheriff of Lincoln County, New Mexico, who killed Billy the Kid in trying to effect his capture, was later shot and died from the effects of the wound given by the hands of a citizen of Las Cruces, who claimed self-defense and was acquitted.—E. R. CAMMERT.

HERE are some tarantulas with some anatomy. Sure it isn't scorpions or something else?

Kansas City, Missouri.

Please tell the boys at the Camp-Fire to make room for me long enough to tell them some dope about the big spiders—tarantulas.

I HAVE seen three species in Pike County, Arkansas—an all black fellow and the kind met with almost everywhere in the South and Southwest, buckskin color, spot on back, spot about the size of a dime. I also found a species there that had the perfect outlines in miniature of a monkey's face on the buckskin colored spot. The natural diet of tarantulas is grasshoppers, etc. Their *bite* is not fatal, for the very reason they are not equipped at the head end with poison glands, but their *sting* is sure death and instead of a single sting they have twin stings—or double—located at the posterior part of the abdomen—same location, and about the same size as a hornet or wasp's sting, but the tarantula's sting is hollow, microscopic in size and emits a fluid when the stings are put in use.

During "cool" weather they are torpid or sluggish, but are very active when necessary in hot weather. They dart at a run at about the same speed backward or forward. Their nest is a hole in the ground. I don't think the black fellows are poisonous. I never could get them to eject any fluid, but the buckskin and monkey face are sure bad medicine, but they never look for trouble. In fact I believe a man would be perfectly safe in a room full of them if he did not injure any of them.—"DIX MYTH."

GUNNING for Uncle Frank Huston on two counts. Probably the answer on the first count is that things have changed since Uncle Frank's day. As to the Pegleg count there are many stories, but this comrade seems sure of his ground:

The Mexican News Bureau
Washington, D. C.

I can not permit the remarks of Uncle Frank Huston regarding the Feather River Cañon to go unchallenged. He says that "if any one can find room for a ranch in Feather River Cañon, he beats the birds who have to fly through it without stopping." (Page 181, July 20th, 1923, issue.)

IF A man who has visited that region various times and who spent over three of the most heart-breaking weeks in his life riding the cañon in search of the body of a loved one who had met a violent death can be said to know anything regarding it, then I am that man. And I found an abundance of ranches in the Feather River cañon, with some of the kindest hearted people that I have ever met, as also some of the most cowardly and treacherous! In the Big Bend of the Feather there are a dozen or more ranches, while scattered along the banks up and down are others. The word "ranch" has a wide meaning. In California a log cabin, a cleared acre or two, constitute a "ranch," just as do several hundred thousand acres of pasture or farm land under one ownership. Anything and everything is a ranch.

Uncle Frank Huston's assertion in this respect is of a piece with a former one in which he said that he had never heard of any one losing his life in search of the Pegleg gold deposit on the Colorado desert. I have already given you the name of one such—Tom Cover of Riverside, California, whose disappearance and undoubted death were fully exploited in the local press at the time—in the latter eighties or early nineties.—G. F. WEEKS.

HERE is what seems a response to a question asked some time ago by one of you concerning an interesting phenomenon.

University of Virginia.

I read with interest comrade F. L. B's. query regarding the peculiar light observed by him in the mountains of New Brunswick.

SUCH phenomena as he reports occur frequently in mountainous regions, having been commented on, as regards this country, in some parts of the mountains of North Carolina, where the appearance of the queer lights created a panic among the mountain people and led, I believe, to a study of the phenomena by the U. S. Weather Bureau. Such "lights" as these occur with especial frequency in the Andes, particularly in Bolivia. I quote from the chapter on Bolivia in Reginald Enoch's book "The Republics of South and Central America."

"Owing to the peculiar topographical formation of the country, electric and other phenomena are of constant occurrence. During this season (just before the rainy season opens), when there have been no electrical storms for several days, large masses of clouds hang over the Cordillera, covering it almost to its base, rising or descending according to the variation of the temperature of the lower atmospheric strata. In such case the accumulated clouds become *luminous at night*, shedding a tremuluous bright halo, accompanied by intermittent flashes of the most vivid light. Sometimes this phenomenon takes place at a single point, as happened in 1878, when the Illampu peak, near the town of Sorata, suddenly became brilliantly lighted, while its surroundings were in total darkness."

IT IS also known that this phenomenon can occur in the absence of visible clouds, as was observed in North Carolina. The scientists state that it is due to the discharges of what they call "brush" electricity—or, perhaps, it is better to say that it is a "brush discharge" of electricity. The mountain peak acts like the business end of a Leyden jar, and the accumulated charge of static electricity leaps from the peak to the receiving medium in the sky (visible or invisible accumulations of water vapor), just as the spark will leap from the point of the rod on a Leyden jar to the receiver.

This seems to me to be a reasonable explanation of this interesting and "skeery" looking stunt of nature, and I trust it will answer the question. Perhaps a query addressed to the U. S. Weather Bureau would bring a better statement of the nature of these visible discharges of "static" by mountain tops.—JAMES C. BARDIN.

AS THIS letter, drawn from our Camp-Fire cache, was written in 1921, it's rather late to apply to comrade Hughes for information, though he probably has still more of it by this time. Our thanks, nevertheless, for the friendly offer.

Edmonton, Alberta.

Just a line to let you know *Adventure* was read by the boys on Great Slave Lake, N. W. T., this last Summer. I have just returned from the far north oil-fields. Any information *re* routes and equipment will be gladly given. Am returning in May.—JACK HUGHES.

A WOMAN comrade from Australia who, I know, will be welcomed by Camp-Fire as of the "right kind."

Parap, Darwin, N. T.

Am an old reader of *Adventure*, but don't find many Australian yarns.

Have seen a bit of wild life, yet, though I've been out bush for twelve years, have never seen a live alligator and only one full grown emu outside a zoo.

MY HUBBY was once treed by a buffalo, but I've only seem tame ones, for the Chinese here use them for woodcarting. Their average speed is about two miles an hour.

I spent two years and six months once down the coast and never saw a white woman for six months.

My nearest white female neighbor was 130 miles away. And among the blacks were Billy the Liar, Paddy the Brute and Ned the Murderer! Once there were only five of us living among 650 blacks and the five were two white men, myself and my two children, one aged two years and one six months.

I HAD to have loaded rifles and shotguns beside my bed and sleep with a loaded revolver under my pillow. Can't afford to take risks with babies about. And to get to the spot we traveled in a whaleboat, then in a steamer, then in a steam launch, then in a blackfellow's canoe cut out of a hollow log. Coming back we traveled in a blackfellow's canoe, then in a dingey and then in an 8-ton pearling lugger, with a triangular cabin four feet high, six feet wide and seven feet long. And some of the charts date back to 1809 on a coast where the sandbanks vary every Spring tide! For on our northern coast the tides have a rise and fall of from 20 to 36 feet as they are neap or springy. Yet I had a glorious time there and would go back down the coast tomorrow if I could. —J. S. Litchfield.

P. S.—Why not offer prizes for the best letter printed in the Camp-Fire? Letters to be, say, three or four pages, interesting and instructive. Prizes to be one, two or three years' subscription to *Adventure.*

THE following letter brings up a question I'd like to lay before you:

Victoria, Australia.

I am an ornithologist and member of R. A. O. U. and am anxious to exchange views with bird students in other countries. I have traveled the length and breadth of this country but my business keeps me here. I can not wander as I should like to and study the birds of other lands.

I could exchange specimens of skins or eggs with collectors anywhere and can give any information as to birds of this country.—U. A. Rue Arnold, 1 Lawgridge St., Middle Park.

We get a good many letters like this and they are always a problem—scientists and collectors of various kinds who wish to get into touch with those of similar interests in other parts of the world.

What shall we do about it? The obvious solution is a new department devoted exclusively to such requests. It would be valuable to many and would further good-fellowship among us.

But there are arguments on the other side:

(1) Space is limited. Would that limited space be filled to overflowing by stamp collectors and "gun cranks" alone?

(2) Would gatherers of picture postcards and souvenirs in general (who would not be entitled to use the department at all) make life a curse to us in the office by flooding us with requests and feel rather disgruntled at the magazine when denied?

(3) Just where would we draw the line in defining the field of the department? Would business men, farmers, manufacturers, clerks, railroad men, and so on all be admitted? Or should it be confined strictly to naturalists and other scientists? If the former, would there be space enough?

(4) The magazine could not, of course, vouch for the reliability of all who used the department. It would have to leave all risk up to those who established relations through its columns. Even between two correspondents both of good intent there might well arise misunderstandings and dissatisfactions. Legally and actually we'd not be to blame, but it wouldn't be human if we didn't often get blamed just the same.

(5) Carrying the last objection further, it is always somewhat risky for a magazine to serve directly in bringing about correspondence between two of its readers. We learned that years ago from our old "Wanted, Men" department. It is a fine scheme and works well in about 98 cases out of 100, but if the 2 other cases turn out bad, or rotten, they come pretty near overbalancing all the 98.

There is undoubtedly a good work to be done in bringing scientists and perhaps some others together by such a department, but can any of you suggest a safe, sane and satisfactory way of doing it? With no small but fatal loop-holes in it?

I'm taking a chance on the above letter because when I fished it out of our cache I saw it was dated 1921 and it is sincere and solid on the face of it. Being three years late in getting into print it can serve as a sample letter without offering much ground for citing it against us as a precedent.—A. S. H.

SERVICES TO OUR READERS

Lost Trails, for finding missing relatives and friends, runs in alternate issues from "Old Songs That Men Have Sung."

Old Songs That Men Have Sung, a section of "Ask Adventure," runs in alternate issues from "Lost Trails."

Camp-Fire Stations: explanation in the second and third issues of each month. Full list in second issue of each month.

Various Practical Services to Any Reader: Free Identification Card in eleven languages (metal, 25 cents); Mail Address and Forwarding Service; Back Issues Exchanged; Camp-Fire Buttons, etc., **runs in the last issue of each month.**

VARIOUS PRACTICAL SERVICES TO ANY READER

These services of *Adventure*, mostly free, are open to any one. They involve much time, work and expense on our part, but we ask in return only that you **read and observe the simple rules**, thus saving needless delay and trouble for us. The whole spirit of the magazine is one of friendliness. No formality between editors and readers. Whenever we can help we're ready and willing to try. **Remember: Magazines are made up ahead of time. Allow for two or three months between sending and publication.**

Identification Cards

Free to any reader. Just send us (1) your name and address, (2) name and address of party to be notified, (3) a stamped and self-addressed return envelope.

Each card bears this inscription, printed in English, French, Spanish, German, Portuguese, Dutch, Italian, Arabic, Chinese, Russian and Japanese:

"In case of death or serious emergency to bearer, address serial number of this card, care of *Adventure*, New York, stating full particulars, and friends will be notified."

In our office, under each serial number, will be registered the name of bearer and of one or two friends, with permanent address of each. No name appears on the card. Letters will be forwarded to friend, unopened by us. Names and addresses treated as confidential. We assume no other obligations. Cards not for business identification. Cards furnished free *provided stamped and addressed envelope accompanies application*. We reserve the right to use our own discretion in all matters pertaining to these cards.

Metal Cards—For twenty-five cents we will send you *post-paid*, the same card in aluminum composition, perforated at each end. Enclose a self-addressed return envelope, but no postage. Twenty-five cents covers everything. Give same data as for pasteboard cards. Holders of pasteboard cards can be registered under both pasteboard and metal cards if desired, but old numbers can not be duplicated on metal cards. If you no longer wish your old card, destroy it carefully and notify us, to avoid confusion and possible false alarms to your friends registered under that card.

A moment's thought will show the value of this system of card-identification for any one, whether in civilization or out of it. Remember to furnish stamped and addressed envelope and to *give in full the names and addresses of self and friend or friends when applying*.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Expeditions and Employment

While we should like to be of aid in these matters, experience has shown that it is not practicable.

Back Issues of *Adventure*

The Boston Magazine Exchange, 24 *T Wharf, Boston, Mass., can supply* Adventure *back through* 1918, *and occasional copies before that.*

WILL BUY: All issues from Vol. 1, No. 1, up to 1920. Write giving dates, price and condition.—Address R. C. WRIGHT, 119 N. Derbigny St., New Orleans, La.

WILL SELL: All issues, 1916, 1917, 1918, 1919, 1920 and 1921. One hundred and twenty-five issues in all. Ten cents per issue; $12.50 for the lot, buyer to pay freight. Also twelve issues of *Romance*, Nov., 1919 to Oct., 1920. $3.00 for the lot, buyer to pay postage.—Address GEO. L. HICKMAN, 2304 Nicholas St., Philadelphia, Pa.

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WILL SELL: All issues, April, 1921 to Dec. 31, 1923 except four issues. 89 copies all in good condition. Best offer takes the lot.—Address F. P. ROBERTSON & SONS, Flemingsburg, Ky., R. D. 2.

WILL SELL: Dec., 1911; Sept., Oct., Nov., Dec., 1916; Jan., Feb., June, July, Aug., Nov., Sept., 1917. Five cents each, plus postage. Also 14 issues of 1922, ten cents each plus postage.—Address O. C. KLEIN, Box 626, Vicksburg, Miss.

Manuscripts

Glad to look at any manuscripts. We have no "regular staff" of writers. A welcome for new writers. *It is not necessary to write asking to submit your work.*

When submitting a manuscript, if you write a letter concerning it, enclose it *with* the manuscript; do *not* send it under separate cover. Enclose stamped and addressed envelope for return. All manuscripts should be typewritten double-spaced, with wide margins, not rolled, name and address on first page. We assume no risk for manuscripts or illustrations submitted, but use all due care while they are in our hands. Payment on acceptance.

We want only clean stories. Sex, morbid, "problem," psychological and supernatural stories barred. Use almost no fact-articles. Can not furnish or suggest collaborators. Use fiction of almost any length; under 3,000 welcomed.

Camp-Fire Stations

Our Camp-Fire is extending its Stations all over the world. Any one belongs who wishes to. Any member desiring to meet those who are still hitting the trails may maintain a Station in his home or shop where wanderers may call and receive such hospitality as the Keeper wishes to offer. The only requirements are that the Station display the regular sign, provide a box for mail to be called for and keep the regular register book and maintain his Station in good repute. Otherwise Keepers run their Stations to suit themselves and are not responsible to this magazine or representative of it. List of Stations and further details are published in the Camp-Fire in the first issue of each month. Address letters regarding stations to J. Cox.

Camp-Fire Buttons

To be worn on lapel of coat by members of Camp-Fire—any one belongs who wishes to. Enameled in dark colors representing earth, sea and sky, and bears the numeral 71—the sum of the letters of the word Camp-Fire valued according to position in the alphabet. Very small and inconspicuous. Designed to indicate the common interest which is the only requisite for membership in Camp-Fire and to enable members to recognize each other when they meet in far places or at home. Twenty-five cents, post-paid, anywhere.

When sending for the button enclose a strong, self-addressed, *un*stamped envelope.

If check or money order is sent, please make it out to the Ridgway Company, *not* to any individual.

Missing Friends or Relatives

(*See Lost Trails*)

Mail Address and Forwarding Service

This office, assuming no responsibility, will be glad to act as a forwarding address for its readers or to hold mail till called for, provided necessary postage is supplied.

Addresses

Camp-Fire—Any one belongs who wishes to.

Rifle Clubs—Address Nat. Rifle Ass'n of America, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Washington, D. C.

(*See also under "Standing Information" in "Ask Adventure."*)

Ask Adventure

A Free Question and Answer Service Bureau of Information on Outdoor Life and Activities Everywhere and Upon the Various Commodities Required Therein. Conducted for *Adventure* Magazine by Our Staff of Experts.

QUESTIONS should be sent, not to this office, but direct to the expert in charge of the section in whose field it falls. So that service may be as prompt as possible, he will answer you by mail direct. But he will also send to us a copy of each question and answer, and from these we shall select those of most general interest and publish them each issue in this department, thus making it itself an exceedingly valuable standing source of practical information. Unless otherwise requested inquirer's name and town are printed with question; street numbers not given.

When you ask for *general* information on a given district or subject the expert may give you some valuable general pointers and refer you to books or to local or special sources of information.

Our experts will in all cases answer to the best of their ability, using their own discretion in all matters pertaining to their sections, subject only to our general rules for "Ask Adventure," but neither they nor the magazine assumes any responsibility beyond the moral one of trying to do the best that is possible. These experts have been chosen by us not only for their knowledge and experience but with an eye to their integrity and reliability. We have emphatically assured each of them that his advice or information is not to be affected in any way by whether a given commodity is or is not advertised in this magazine.

1. **Service free to anybody, provided self-addressed envelop and *full* postage, *not attached,* are enclosed. (See footnote at bottom of page.) Correspondents writing to or from foreign countries will please enclose International Reply Coupons, purchasable at any post-office, and exchangeable for stamps of any country in the International Postal Union.**
2. **Send each question direct to the expert in charge of the particular section whose field covers it. He will reply by mail. Do NOT send questions to this magazine.**
3. **No reply will be made to requests for partners, for financial backing, or for chances to join expeditions. "Ask Adventure" covers business and work opportunities, but only if they are outdoor activities, and only in the way of general data and advice. It is in no sense an employment bureau.**
4. **Make your questions definite and specific. State exactly your wants, qualification and intentions. Explain your case sufficiently to guide the expert you question.**
5. **Send no question until you have read very carefully the exact ground covered by the particular expert in whose section it seems to belong.**

1. The Sea Part 1 American Waters
Beriah Brown, 1624 Biegelow Ave., Olympia, Wash. Ships, seamen and shipping; nautical history, seamanship, navigation, yachting, small-boat sailing; commercial fisheries of North America; marine bibliography of U. S.; fishing-vessels of the North Atlantic and Pacific banks. (*See next section.*)

2. The Sea Part 2 British Waters
Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.* Seamanship, navigation, old-time sailorizing, ocean-cruising, etc. Questions on the sea, ships and men local to the British Empire go to Captain Dingle, not Mr. Brown.

3. The Sea Part 3 Statistics of American Shipping
Harry E. Rieseberg, Apt. 347-A, Kew Gardens, Washington, D. C. Historical records, tonnages, names and former names, dimensions, services, power, class, rig, builders, present and past ownerships, signals, etc., of all vessels of the American Merchant Marine and Government vessels in existence over five gross tons in the United States, Panama and the Philippines, and the furnishing of information and records of vessels under American registry as far back as 1760.

4. Islands and Coasts Part 1 Islands of Indian and Atlantic Oceans; the Mediterranean; Cape Horn and Magellan Straits
Captain A. E. Dingle, care *Adventure.* Ports, trade, peoples, travel. (*See next section.*)

5. Islands Part 2 Haiti, Santo Domingo, Porto Rico, Virgin and Jamaica Groups
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Languages, mining, minerals, fishing, sugar, fruit and tobacco production.

6. ★ New Zealand; and the South Sea Islands Part 1 Cook Islands, Samoa
Tom L. Mills, *The Feilding Star*, Feilding, New Zealand. Travel, history, customs; adventure, exploring, sport. (*Postage two cents.*)

7. South Sea Islands Part 2 French Oceania (Tahiti, the Society, Paumoto, Marquesas); Islands of Western Pacific (Solomons, New Hebrides, Fiji, Tonga); of Central Pacific (Guam, Ladrone, Pelew, Caroline, Marshall, Gilbert, Ellice); of the Detached (Wallis, Penrhyn, Danger, Easter, Rotuma, Futuna, Pitcairn).
Charles Brown, Jr., P. O. Box 308, San Francisco, Calif. Inhabitants, history, travel, sports, equipment, climate, living conditions, commerce, pearling, vanilla and coconut culture.

8. ★ Australia and Tasmania
Phillip Norman, care Suburban Dailies Ltd., 16-18 O'Connell St., Newtown, Sydney, N. S. W., Australia. Customs, resources, travel, hunting, sports, history. (*Postage ten cents.*)

9. Malaysia, Sumatra and Java
Fay-Cooper Cole, Ph. D., Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, Ill. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions.

10. ★ New Guinea
L. P. B. Armit, Port Moresby, Territory of Papua, *via* Sydney, Australia. Hunting and fishing, exploring, commerce, inhabitants, history, institutions. Questions regarding the measures or policy of the Government or proceedings of Government officers not answered. (*Postage ten cents*).

11. Philippine Islands.
Buck Connor, L. B. 4, Quartzsite, Ariz. History, inhabitants, topography, customs, travel, hunting, fishing, minerals, agriculture, commerce.

12. Hawaiian Islands and China
F. J. Halton, 1402 Lytton Bldg., Chicago, Ill. Customs, travel, natural history, resources, agriculture, fishing, hunting.

13. Japan
Grace P. T. Knudson, Castine, Me. Commerce, politics, people, customs, history, geography, travel, agriculture, art, curios.

★ (*Enclose addressed envelop with ten cents in stamps NOT attached*)

14. Asia Part 1 Arabia, Persia, India, Tibet, Burma, Western China, Borneo
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Hunting, exploring, traveling, customs.

15. Asia Part 2 Siam, Andamans, Malay Straits, Straits Settlements, Shan States and Yunnan
Gordon MacCreagh, 21 East 14th St., New York. Hunting, trading, traveling, customs.

16. Asia Part 3 Coast of Northeastern Siberia, and Adjoining Waters
Captain C. L. Oliver, P. O. Box 2882, Tampa, Fla. Natives, language, mining, trading, customs, climate. Arctic Ocean: Winds, currents, depths, ice conditions, walrus-hunting.

17. Asia Part 4 North China, Mongolia and Chinese Turkestan
George W. Twomey, M. D., 41 Rue de France, Tientsin, China. Natives, languages, trading, customs, climate and hunting.

18. Africa Part 1 Sierra Leone to Old Calabar, West Africa, Southern and Northern Nigeria
Robert Simpson, care *Adventure.* Labor, trade, expenses, outfitting, living conditions, tribal customs, transportation.

19. ✠ Africa Part 2 Transvaal, N. W. and Southern Rhodesia, British East, Uganda and the Upper Congo
Charles Beadle, care of Agence Cook et Fils, Nice, France. Geography, hunting, equipment, trading, climate, transport, customs, living conditions, witchcraft, adventure and sport.

20. Africa Part 3 Cape Colony, Orange River Colony, Natal and Zululand
Captain F. J. Franklin, care Adventurers' Club of Chicago, 40 South Clark St., Chicago, Ill. Climate, shooting and fishing, imports and exports; health resorts, minerals, direct shipping routes from U. S., living conditions, travel, opportunities for employment. Free booklets on: Orange-growing, apple-growing, sugar-growing, maize-growing; viticulture; sheep and fruit ranching.

21. ✠ Africa Part 4 Portuguese East
R. G. Waring, Corunna, Ont., Canada. Trade, produce, climate, opportunities, game, wild life, travel, expenses, outfits, health, etc. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

22. Africa Part 5 Morocco
George E. Holt, care *Adventure.* Travel, tribes, customs, history, topography, trade.

23. Africa Part 6 Tripoli
Captain Beverley Giddings, care *Adventure.* Including the Sahara Tuaregs and caravan routes. Traveling, exploring, customs, caravan trade.

24. Africa Part 7 Egypt, Tunis, Algeria
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, ancient and modern; monuments, languages, races, customs, commerce.

25. Africa Part 8 Sudan
W. T. Moffat, 67 Burlington Road Fulham, London, S.W. 6, England. Climate, prospects, trading, traveling, customs, history.

26. Turkey
Miss Jeannette Frances Edwards, David Lane, East Hampton, N. Y. Travel, history, geography, races, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

27. Asia Minor
(Editor to be appointed.)

28. Bulgaria, Roumania
(Editor to be appointed.) Travel, history, topography, languages, customs, trade opportunities.

29. Albania
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

30. Jugo-Slavia and Greece
Lieut. William Jenna, Plattsburg Barracks, New York. History, politics, customs, geography, language, travel, outdoor life.

31. Scandinavia
Robert S. Townsend, 1447 Irving St., Washington, D. C. History, politics, customs, languages, inhabitants, sports, travel, outdoor life.

32. Germany, Czecho-Slovakia, Austria, Poland
Fred F. Fleischer, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. History, politics, customs, languages, trade opportunities, travel, sports, outdoor life.

33. Great Britain
Thomas Bowen Partington, Constitutional Club, Northumberland Ave., W. C. 2, London, England. General information.

34. South America Part 1 Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, Bolivia and Chile
Edgar Young, care *Adventure.* Geography, inhabitants, history, industries, topography, minerals, game, languages, customs.

35. South America Part 2 Venezuela, the Guianas and Brazil
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Travel, history, customs, industries, topography, inhabitants, languages, hunting and fishing.

36. South America Part 3 Argentina, Uruguay and Paraguay
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Geography, travel, agriculture, cattle, timber, inhabitants, camping and exploration, general information. Questions regarding employment not answered.

37. Central America
Charles Bell Emerson, Adventure Cabin, Los Gatos, Calif. Canal Zone, Panama, Costa Rica, Nicaragua, Honduras, British Honduras, Salvador, Guatemala. Travel, languages, game, conditions, minerals, trading.

38. Mexico Part 1 Northern
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Border States of old Mexico—Sonora, Chihuahua, Coahuila, Nuevo Leon and Tamaulipas. Minerals, lumbering, agriculture, travel, customs, topography, climate, inhabitants, hunting, history, industries.

39. Mexico Part 2 Southern; and Lower California
C. R. Mahaffey, care of Roadmaster, S. P. Co., San José, Calif. Lower California; Mexico south of a line from Tampico to Mazatlan. Mining, agriculture, topography, travel, hunting, lumbering, history, inhabitants, business and general conditions.

40. ✠ Canada Part 1 Height of Land, Region of Northern Quebec and Northern Ontario (except **Strip between Minn. and C. P. Ry.**); **Southeastern Ungava and Keewatin**
S. E. Sangster ("Canuck"), L. B. 393, Ottawa, Canada. Sport, canoe routes, big game, fish, fur; equipment; Indian life and habits; Hudson's Bay Co. posts; minerals, timber, customs regulations. No questions answered on trapping for profit. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

41. ✠ Canada Part 2 Ottawa Valley and Southeastern Ontario
Harry M. Moore, Deseronto, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, mining, lumbering, agriculture, topography, travel, camping. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

42. ✠ Canada Part 3 Georgian Bay and Southern Ontario
A. D. L. Robinson, 173 Maple Ave., Pembroke, Ont., Canada. Fishing, hunting, trapping, canoeing. *Postage 3 cents.*)

43. Canada Part 4 Hunters Island and English River District
T. F. Phillips, Department of Science, Duluth Central High School, Duluth, Minn. Fishing, camping, hunting, trapping, canoeing, climate, topography, travel.

44. Canada Part 5 Yukon, British Columbia and Alberta
Ed. L. Carson, Monroe, Wash. Including Peace River district; to Great Slave Lake. Outfits and equipment, guides, big game, minerals, forest, prairie; travel; customs regulations.

45. ✠ Canada Part 6 Manitoba, Saskatchewan, Mackenzie and Northern Keewatin
Reece H. Hague, The Pas, Manitoba, Canada. Homesteading, mining, hunting, trapping, lumbering and travel. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

46. ✠ Canada Part 7 New Brunswick, Nova Scotia, Newfoundland and Southeastern Quebec
Jas. F. B. Belford, Codrington, Ont., Canada. Hunting, fishing, lumbering, camping, trapping, auto and canoe trips, history, topography, farming, homesteading, mining, paper industry, water-power. (*Postage 3 cents.*)

47. Alaska
Theodore S. Solomons, Larkspur, Calif. Arctic life and travel; boats, packing, back-packing, traction, transport, routes; equipment, clothing, food; physics, hygiene; mountain work.

48. Baffinland and Greenland
Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Hunting, expeditions, dog-team work, whaling, geology, ethnology (Eskimo).

49. Western U. S. Part 1 Calif., Ore., Wash., Nev., Utah and Ariz.
E. E. Harriman, 2303 W. 23rd St., Los Angeles, Calif. Game, fur, fish; camp, cabin; mines, minerals; mountains.

50. Western U. S. Part 2 New Mexico
H. F. Robinson, 200-202 Korber Block, Albuquerque, N. M. Agriculture, automobile routes, Indians, Indian dances, including the snake dance, oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping; history, early and modern.

51. Western U. S. Part 3 Colo. and Wyo.
Frank Middleton, 509 Frémont St., Laramie, Wyo. Geography, agriculture, stock-raising, mining, hunting, fishing, trapping, camping and outdoor life in general.

52. Western U. S. Part 4 Mont. and the Northern Rocky Mountains.
Chester C. Davis, Helena, Mont. Agriculture, mining, northwestern oil-fields, hunting, fishing, camping, automobile tours, guides, early history.

✠ (*Enclose addressed envelop with three cents in stamps NOT attached.*)

53. Western U. S. Part 5 Idaho and Surrounding Country
R. T. Newman, Box 833, Anaconda, Mont. Camping, shooting, fishing, equipment, information on expeditions, history and in habitants

54. Western U. S. Part 6 Tex. and Okla.
J. W. Whiteaker, 1505 W. 10th St., Austin, Tex. Minerals, agriculture, travel, topography, climate, hunting, history, industries.

55. Middle Western U. S. Part 1 The Dakotas, Neb., Ia., Kan.
Joseph Mills Hanson (lately Capt. A. E. F.), care *Adventure*. Hunting, fishing, travel. Especially, early history of Missouri Valley.

56. Middle Western U. S. Part 2 Mo. and Ark.
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Also the Missouri Valley up to Sioux City, Iowa. Wilder countries of the Ozarks, and swamps; hunting, fishing, trapping, farming, mining and range lands; big-timber sections.

57. Middle Western U. S. Part 3 Ind., Ill., Mich., Wis., Minn. and Lake Michigan
John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing, clamming, hunting, trapping, lumbering, canoeing, camping, guides, outfits, motoring, agriculture, minerals, natural history, early history, legends.

58. Middle Western U. S. Part 4 Mississippi River
Geo. A. Zerr, Vine and Hill Sts., Crafton P. O., Ingram, Pa. Routes, connections, itineraries; all phases of river steamer and power-boat travel; history and idiosyncrasies of the river and its tributaries. Questions regarding methods of working one's way should be addressed to Mr. Spears. (*See next section.*)

59. Eastern U. S. Part 1 Miss., O., Tenn., Michigan and Hudson Valleys, Great Lakes, Adirondacks
Raymond S. Spears, Inglewood, Calif. Automobile, motor-cycle, bicycle and pedestrian touring; shanty-boating, river-tripping; outfit suggestions, including those for the transcontinental trails; game, fish and woodcraft; furs, fresh-water pearls, herbs.

60. Eastern U. S. Part 2 Motor-Boat and Canoe Cruising on Delaware and Chesapeake Bays and Tributary Rivers
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Motor-boat equipment and management. Oystering, crabbing, eeling, black bass, pike, sea-trout, croakers; general fishing in tidal waters. Trapping and trucking on Chesapeake Bay. Water fowl and upland game in Maryland and Virginia. Early history of Delaware, Virginia and Maryland.

61. Eastern U. S. Part 3 Marshes and Swamplands of the Atlantic Coast from Philadelphia to Jacksonville
Howard A. Shannon, care *Adventure*. Okefinokee and Dismal, Okranoke and the Marshes of Glynn; Croatan Indians of the Carolinas. History, traditions, customs, hunting, modes of travel, snakes.

62. Eastern U. S. Part 4 Southern Appalachians
William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Alleghanies, Blue Ridge, Smokies, Cumberland Plateau, Highland Rim. Topography, climate, timber, hunting and fishing, automobiling, national forests, general information.

63. Eastern U. S. Part 5 Tenn., Ala. Miss., N. and S. C., Fla. and Ga.
Hapsburg Liebe, Box 432, Orlando, Fla. Except Tennessee River and Atlantic seaboard. Hunting, fishing, camping; logging, lumbering, sawmilling, saws.

64. Eastern U. S. Part 6 Maine
Dr. G. E. Hathorne, 70 Main St., Bangor, Me. Fishing, hunting, canoeing, guides, outfits, supplies.

A.—Radio

Donald McNicol, 132 Union Road, Roselle Park, N. J. Telegraphy, telephony, history, broadcasting, apparatus, invention, receiver construction, portable sets.

B.—Mining and Prospecting

Victor Shaw, Ketchikan, Alaska. Territory anywhere on the continent of North America. Questions on mines, mining law, mining, mining methods or practise; where and how to prospect, how to outfit; how to make the mine after it is located; how to work it and how to sell it; general geology necessary for miner or prospector, including the precious and base metals and economic minerals such as pitchblende or uranium, gypsum, mica, cryolite, etc. Questions regarding investment or the merits of any particular company are excluded.

C.—Old Songs That Men Have Sung

A department for collecting hitherto unpublished specimens and for answering questions concerning all songs of the out-of-doors that have had sufficient virility to outlast their immediate day; chanteys, "forebitters," ballads—songs of outdoor men—sailors, lumberjacks, soldiers, cowboys, pioneers, rivermen, canal-men, men of the Great Lakes, voyageurs, railroad men, miners, hoboes, plantation hands, etc.—R. W. Gordon, 1262 Euclid Ave., Berkeley, Calif.

D.—Weapons, Past and Present

Rifles, shotguns, pistols, revolvers, ammunition and edged weapons. (Any questions on the arms adapted to a particular locality should *not* be sent to this department but to the "Ask Adventure" editor covering the district.)

1.—All Shotguns, including foreign and American makes; wing shooting. John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*.

2.—All Rifles, Pistols and Revolvers, including foreign and American makes. Donegan Wiggins, R. F. D. 3, Lock Box 75, Salem, Ore.

3.—Edged Weapons, and Firearms Prior to 1800. Swords, pikes, knives, battle-axes, etc., and all firearms of the flintlock, matchlock, wheel-lock and snaphaunce varieties. Lewis Appleton Barker, 40 University Road, Brookline, Mass.

E.—Salt and Fresh Water Fishing

John B. Thompson ("Ozark Ripley"), care of *Adventure*. Fishing-tackle and equipment; fly and bait casting and bait; camping-outfits; fishing-trips.

F.—Tropical Forestry

William R. Barbour, Room 423, Fisk Bldg., Broadway at 57th St., New York. Tropical forests and forest products; their economic possibilities; distribution, exploration, etc.

G.—Aviation

Lieut.-Col. W. G. Schauffler, Jr., 2940 Newark St., N. W., Washington, D. C. Airplanes; airships; aeronautical motors; airways and landing fields; contests; Aero Clubs; insurance; aeronautical laws; licenses; operating data; schools; foreign activities; publications. No questions answered regarding aeronautical stock-promotion companies.

H.—Army Matters, United States and Foreign

Fred. F. Fleischer, 464 Park Ave., West New York, N. J. *United States:* Military history, Military policy. National Defense Act of 1920. Regulations and matters in general for organized reserves. Army and uniform regulations, infantry drill regulations, field service regulations. Tables of organization. Citizens' military training camps. *Foreign:* Strength and distribution of foreign armies before the war. Uniforms. Strength of foreign armies up to date. History of armies of countries covered by Mr. Fleischer in general, "Ask Adventure" section. *General:* Tactical questions on the late war. Detailed information on all operations during the late war from the viewpoint of the German high command. Questions regarding enlisted personnel and officers, except such as are published in Officers' Directory, can not be answered.

I.—American Anthropology North of the Panama Canal

Arthur Woodward, 217 W. 125th St., New York. Customs, dress, architecture, pottery and decorative arts, weapons and implements, fetishism, social divisions.

J.—STANDING INFORMATION

For **Camp-Fire Stations** write J. Cox, care *Adventure*.

For general information on **U. S.** and its **possessions,** write Supt. of Public Documents, Wash, D. C., for catalog of all Government publications. For **U. S., its possessions and most foreign countries,** the Dept. of Com., Wash., D. C.

For the **Philippines, Porto Rico,** and customs receiverships in **Santo Domingo** and **Haiti,** the Bureau of Insular Affairs, War Dept., Wash., D. C.

For **Alaska,** the Alaska Bureau, Chamber of Commerce, Central Bldg., Seattle, Wash.

For **Hawaii,** Hawaii Promotion Committee, Chamber of Commerce, Honolulu, T. H. Also, Dept. of the Interior, Wash., D. C.

For **Cuba,** Bureau of Information, Dept. of Agri., Com. and Labor, Havana, Cuba.

The Pan-American Union for general information on **Latin-American matters** or for specific data. Address L. S. Rowe, Dir. Gen., Wash., D. C.

For **R. C. M. P.,** Commissioner Royal Canadian Mounted Police, Ottawa, Can. Only unmarried British subjects, age 18 to 40, above 5 ft. 8 in. and under 175 lbs.

For **Canal Zone,** the Panama Canal Com., Wash., D. C.

National Rifle Association of America, Brig. Gen. Fred H. Phillips, Jr., Sec'y, 1108 Woodward Bldg., Wash., D. C.

United States **Revolver** Ass'n. W. A. Morrall, Sec'y-Treas., Hotel Virginia, Columbus, O.

National parks, how to get there and what to do when there. Address National Park Service, Washington, D. C.

Personal

READERS have been asking for the autobiographies of "Ask Adventure" editors; and those staff members who believe that a few words about themselves will promote better acquaintanceship all around are responding to the request. The order in which these autobiographies are printed doesn't signify anything. They are withdrawn from the file at random.

Tientsin, China.

You have asked me to introduce myself to the readers of *Adventure*. I was born and spent the early years of my life in southern Indiana, moving to Louisville, Ky., at an early age. I served in the war with Spain in Cuba and acquired a strong case of *Wanderlust*, from which I have never fully recovered.

After I was discharged from the Army at the end of the Spanish War I entered the University of Louisville and was graduated in medicine in 1903. I practised medicine in Louisville until 1916, when I went to the border with the National Guard. After spending almost a year in the Brownsville district I was ordered North and spent several months in Northern camps.

I went overseas in the Summer of 1918, and after a term of service with the 88th Division I was transferred to the 1st Division and served in the Army of Occupation with the Sanitary Train of the First Division. I returned to the States in the Summer of 1919 with the First, and after parading in New York and Washington we were ordered to Camp Taylor, Louisville, Ky., for station.

A few weeks of my old home town were enough for me, and as soon as I had a chance I volunteered for foreign service in Siberia. Unfortunately I never saw Siberia as while we were at sea the United States decided to withdraw all troops from Siberia, and I was ordered to the Philippines. I served a year at Fort William McKinley, just outside of Manila, and was discharged on the last day of 1920.

After being discharged I came to Hongkong, and, making a leisurely journey up the China coast, I finally reached Shanghai. At Shanghai I met a number of people, and some one advised me that if I was really anxious to see China I should go in the famine district with the American Red Cross Famine Relief. A week later I was in the middle of Shantung Province, a hundred miles from the nearest railway station, in charge of sanitation for the Red Cross.

A few months later I was sent to Shansi Province to clean up an epidemic of typhus and relapsing fevers. This work kept me busy until the middle of September, when the famine was over and work ceased.

I went to Peking and in a few days was offered the position of surgeon at Tsing Hua College. This was one of the most interesting years that I have ever spent.

I will tell you something about this school. You may remember that during the administration of President Roosevelt the Boxer indemnity which the United States received from China was returned to China on condition that this money be expended in sending young Chinese to the United States to be educated. Tsing Hua College is the result of this agreement between the United States and China.

The school is located at Tsing Hua Yuan on the Peking Suiyan Railway, a few miles from Peking and three miles from the new Summer Palace. Yuan Ming Yuan was the name of the old Summer Palace, built in the early part of the eighteenth century and destroyed by the British troops in 1860. A part of the land belonging to the palace was set aside as the grounds of the college, and work on the buildings was commenced in 1911.

Several American teachers were brought out from the States, and a number of foreign-trained Chinese were employed. From that nucleus the institution has grown until it has a faculty of about one hundred teachers, foreign and Chinese, five hundred students and a large executive staff. The total population of Tsing Hua College is now close to a thousand people.

The school has a fine auditorium, library, science building and gymnasium; excellent dormitories and class-rooms and up-to-date houses for the faculty and staff. The hospital is well equipped and contains sixty beds and everything necessary for the conduct of a modern hospital.

Originally the course of instruction was eight years; but recently the entrance requirements have been raised, and students are not admitted unless they have a good working knowledge of English. The course of instruction is good, and most of the graduates enter the sophomore year at the American universities.

Entrance to the school is supposed to be by competitive examination; but in China a competitive examination is different from one at home. Many of the students come from official families, and there are very few poor students.

After graduation the students are sent to the United States, where they are supported by the Chinese Government for five years. All tuition fees are paid, and each student receives eighty dollars a month for his expenses.

I remained at Tsing Hua for one year; then, seeing a good opening at Tientsin, I resigned and opened an office here. My principal interests aside from the practise of medicine are stamp-collecting and the collecting of Chinese curios.

I am trying to organize a real information service for readers of *Adventure*. I have clippings from the principal newspapers in this part of the country and other articles dealing with a large list of matters referring to North China, Mongolia and Turkestan. I am also accumulating a library along these lines, and in the future I hope to have a supply of information that will cover my territory very completely.

If any *Adventure* readers have any books, magazines or papers dealing with any of the countries I have mentioned I will be glad if they will send them to me after they have finished with them. If you want them returned, tell me and I will return them after I have looked them over and made a few notes for my files.—G. W. TWOMEY.

The full statement of the sections in this department as given in this issue, is printed only in alternate issues.

Note from an "A. A." Man

IN "ASK ADVENTURE" of the issue for March 30th, 1924, Mr. John B. Thompson told an inquirer that the gage of a shotgun was measured by "the number of round balls that make an ounce load; as for instance in twelve-gage twelve went to the ounce; in sixteen, sixteen went to the ounce, etc." Mr. Thompson writes to correct himself, calls his statement "a glaring error," and adds:

> I used the word "ounce" instead of "pound." In payment for my failure to read over my answer carefully I will directly answer all those who take me to task for it. I look for many to come, so I am willing to pay the price of my inexcusable sin.

Friends, Mr. Thompson really does know his subject; he's an international authority on shotguns—among other things—and holder of a number of records.

Farmlands of New Zealand

READY markets for wool—dairy products—wheat:

Question:—"What are the chances to make good in New Zealand in auto and tractor-repairing lines? Do you think that the automobile business will have a good future there with the return of good times? (Your opinion only!)

What are the chances generally speaking in farming? What do lands sell for? Does the Government sell land, or is it all in the hands of private individuals? Can wheat be marketed easily? Dairy products?

What chances would there be to start in farming with two thousand dollars? With five thousand dollars?

Am a young man, farm-raised; then three years' experience in automobile-repairing in service stations at Detroit, Mich. I am looking for the future; that is for something more than just a job. I've got that here. But I want a chance to acquire a home without being reduced to being 'a cog in the wheel.' I have lived off and on in both country and city and prefer the former; but lands here cost $150 to $400 an acre and don't pay interest on investment.

In the automobile-repairing line I can make a living especially as auto electrician, which I have specialized in a couple of years. But the repairing game is rapidly going into the hands of big capital (in worth-while places) so I would just as soon clear out.

What is the attitude in New Zealand in general to immigrants? Am U. S. citizen of Swedish parentage (two generations back).

What is the financial situation generally?"—WILHELM JOHNSON, Cokato, Minn.

P. S. Farm experience: General farming, small grain, corn, dairying. Farming done by machinery, horses and gas-tractor.

Answer, by Mr. Mills:—The big interests have not got their tentacles on New Zealand, and there are still chances for an enterprising man out here. With your automobile experience you could and should locate in a country town, thus getting the chance to work at your trade and at the same time acquire an adjacent piece of land and develop the latter as a specialty. I'm sure New Zealand would prove worth while to you.

There is a splendid future for the automobile and tractor industry over here, as the New Zealanders are men who are willing to try anything new and are keen for labor-saving machinery. Already motor vehicles cover our roads and tractors the earth. Naturally there are many men at the game of garage and workshop, but there is always room for the best.

New Zealand is essentially an agricultural and pastoral country. Wool used to be our principal article of export, and it still is the Land of the Golden Fleece. But the dairying industry is fast becoming the foremost in a land literally overflowing with milk and honey. Our butter and cheese are graded top all over the world—and that is largely because it is graded from the factory by the Government experts before it is exported.

Good land is fairly dear over here because there is such a demand for settlement. The price varies with the settled or unsettled district. Most of the land is owned and leased by the Government. There is much freehold, however, in private hands; but the high tax imposed to burst up big holdings is having the right effect of forcing the big man to cut up his ranch for closer settlement.

All the wheat that we can grow is readily sold. There is a greater demand for our dairy produce at home and abroad than we can supply.

You could make a fair start with from two thousand to five thousand dollars if you looked around a bit first. We are looking for more people and have been encouraging immigrants from England right up to now. No objection to your nationality. Financial position improving every day—we see the silver lining, we have turned the corner, we are futurily optimistic.—*Kia Ora!*

Free service, but don't ask us to pay the postage to get it to you.

Canoeing the Quetico-Superior Region

YOU can make the trip without a guide:

Question:—"Am contemplating a canoe trip this Summer in southeastern Ontario; that is, the country just east of the Lake of the Woods and around Rainy Lake. My knowledge of this country is very slight, and I would be very much obliged for any information that would be of assistance to me in such a trip, including information as to the route, best time of year, danger of rapids, etc. Not interested in fishing or hunting. Having made trips in Wisconsin for last five years, am experienced in canoeing, etc.; but trips in Canada are different, I am told.

Where can I get maps?"—EDWARD W. ROSE, Chicago, Ill.

Answer, by Mr. Phillips:—The usual starting point for a canoe trip into the Superior National Forest and the Quetico Provincial Park (southwestern Ontario) is Winton, Minn., the end of the Duluth & Iron Range R.R. The trip is often from the above-named town to International Falls, Minn., the western end of Rainy Lake. Most of the trips are out of Winton and return to same place.

At the Chicago office of the Canadian Pacific Ry. get their folder on the Quetico. I will have the Duluth & Iron Range R.R. send you folders of their routes. If you do not hear from them soon, write them directly. The Department of Mines and Forests, Ottawa, Can., will also furnish you maps of the Quetico.

This is a great canoe country, and you will not regret coming this way. There are some rapids; the only safe way is not to shoot any of them. They are well marked as to their danger. You would not need a guide unless you wished to make speed.

The Winton Trading Co., Winton, Minn., can furnish you with canoes and groceries. Be sure to write them in advance.

Address your question direct to the expert in charge, NOT to the magazine.

Fur-Bearers of the Yukon

ALSO about poor Lo and things in general:

Question:—"Would you please inform me on the trapping and trading conditions of British Columbia and the Yukon?

In what parts can one find the most fur-bearing animals? Names of animals in order of abundance? Where are wolves most plentiful? Are these places accessible by water or trail?

What is used in trading for furs among Indians? Where are the Indians generally found?

Is Prince Rupert a good post for the independent trader or trapper to start from? What trading-districts are accessible from this place?

Are the islands along the coast as good as the mainland? What animals are on the islands?"—R. D. GILBERT, Albuquerque, N. Mex.

Answer, by Mr. Carson:—You seem to have a very vague idea of the size of the country you expect so much information respecting. I can only answer you in a general way since it would be rather difficult to tell you where, in a territory covering several thousand square miles, the best place was for a wolf-hunt for example.

Fur is found in nearly every unsettled part of these two countries; but nowhere in abundance.

Muskrat, beaver, marten, otter, fisher, ermine, fox, lynx, wolverine, skunk, wolf, coyote, bear, and bobcat are all represented; but you would have to travel a great many miles in order to secure a specimen of each.

Indians are found pretty much all over; and the proper thing to use in trading with them is money. Cash is what they value the most highly.

If you contemplate a fur-buying trip go up the river as far as Hazelton or go over to the Naas River and start in there. Both these places are reached *via* Prince Rupert.

Both the Queen Charlottes and Vancouver Islands are very good trapping-grounds, the same animals being found there as on the mainland.

I would suggest that you go up to Hazelton, B. C., and stick around for about six months with your ears open in order to get wise to the general run of the trapping business. You will require six months' residence before you can obtain a license to trap; and as jobs are fairly plentiful for the man who is not too particular what he starts in at, this would be a good way to acquire a bunch of first-hand information.

By mixing with the people who live and work there you will hear a lot about things in general. North of Hazelton there is fair trapping-ground as well as good hunting and fishing. You cannot go into the timber and knock fur-bearing animals over with a club. They won't stand for it. Neither can you take in a bunch of pocket mirrors and a few strings of beads and persuade the more or less noble red man to hand you over a few thousand dollars' worth of rare skins. He won't stand for that either.

Trapping means, first, skill obtained by experience· second, hard work in severe weather and solitude; third, a certain percentage of luck in getting into good trapping ground since the trap-line that paid large returns last year may be practically deserted now.

A good system for the cheechako or greenhorn to play is to get in touch with some experienced trapper and take him as a partner. He will get a lot of fun out of you and a heap of hard work; but you will gain so much from his experience and knowledge that you will be a long way ahead at the finish.

A Painter in China

MOUNTAINOUS Shansi:

Question:—"I am going to ask just two questions: General information about China?

Is there any chance of studying the country and painting pictures, for one who does not know the country or language?

I am a student of the arts and am earning my education by doing hospital work—bacteriology, pathology (technician) and general laboratory work. Am not an expert but can handle a small lab. I wonder if I could get hospital or newspaper work in China—enough to pay expenses. Thank you!

Enclosed please find stamps and return envelop."—ERNEST FREEMAN HISER, San Leandro, Calif.

Answer, by Dr. Twomey:—China is a country of thousands of square miles, populated by several hundred million people, and it is difficult to give you much general information in one letter, but I will do my best.

Climate: This varies from tropical to very cold and from very damp to desert. In the south the climate is very hot, and there is much rain; while in the north in Mongolia and in the extreme west there is a huge expanse of desert where the temperature often reaches 35 to 45 below zero.

There is a great variation in the customs of the people caused by the differences in the climate. Many different dialects are spoken, but if one is familiar with the Mandarin dialect it is possible to travel pretty much all over China without trouble. The educated classes always speak the Mandarin, but the poor people frequently can not understand a man from a town a hundred miles away.

For a good description of northern and central China I would refer you to "Chinese Characteristics" and "Chinese Village Life," two books by Dr. Arthur H. Smith of Peking. These books can be secured from La Libraire Française, Tientsin, China, at a cost of $4 U. S. money each.

Studying the country: This is easy. All you have to do is to go to one of the treaty ports and secure an interpreter and boy, buy your camp equipment and start for the country. A short trip into the interior with a few stops at any of the smaller villages would give you much material for pictures.

I would suggest that you make your start from Peking and visit some of the famous scenes in that vicinity, or if you want to get off the trail, visit Shansi Province on the Peking-Hankow Railroad, twenty hours' ride from Peking. In Shansi you will find many interesting mountain scenes. Again, you might go to Kalgan in Mongolia, north of Peking and make trips into the Mongolian Desert, where you will find many absorbing subjects.

If you don't want an answer enough to enclose* full *return postage to carry it, you don't want it.

Spanish Surveys of Texas Land

SOURCE of many a lawsuit:

Question:—"Is there such a thing as a book of signs used by the Mexicans, to mark the spot where they have hid valuables? Or in other words the signs they used long ago, as the Indians did in place of writing? The reason I desire to find out is because I know of a place where the Mexicans buried a considerable amount of gold and silver about the year 1841.

I have found what I believe to be the last sign that they made leading to it. I judge this to be the sign closest to it from the way it was hid, and also from the nature of the sign. It is a small rock shaped like a flatiron. It is about ten inches wide at the wide end, and comes to a point like a flatiron. It has on one side of it several marks, which appear to have been cut with a chisel or some like instrument. The most prominent mark on it I have drawn on paper and shown to several Mexicans, and they all say it is the Mexican sign for buried treasure, but I have not found any one of them that could read the rest of the signs on the rock that tells where it is. But they all say it is not many feet from where I found that rock. I found the rock under a large rock that would weigh at least a ton, and I am satisfied that it was placed there by the Mexicans as the last mark for their stuff they buried."—H. S. McPherson, Everman, Tex.

Answer, by Mr. Whiteaker:—Those that have buried treasure do not have any regular signs to point to the place of burial, so as each party has an original sign to mark such a place, it is not likely that a book could be written on the subject. I know of no book that is used for the purpose of finding buried treasure.

The Indians used a picture-writing system of communication between the different members of their tribes and with allied tribes. Signs meant a lot to them—Nature spoke to them from trees, clouds, smoke, thunder, rain, etc., and they were always ready to read these signs. I never heard of any of the Indians burying money, etc., and leaving signs at the place to find the spot. When one of their members died often his arrows, favorite dog, horse, tomahawk and such were buried with him, for he would need them when he arrived at the "Happy Hunting-Grounds," or Indian heaven. I have seen several Indian graves opened, but all of value that I found were a few arrow-heads or tomahawks.

The rock that you spoke about is perhaps one of the landmarks that the old-timers used for setting off the corners of their land. In the early days of Texas land was given for colonization purposes. Usually one man could have all of the land that he could plow around in a day.

At the corners a pyramid-shaped rock was chiseled with the name of the man, direction, angle and bearing-mark and then a large pile of rocks covered the pyramid rock so that it could be easily found later when the surveyor came out to measure off the land with his rawhide chain. The chain was so many *varas* (Spanish yards) long. The condition of the weather was a big factor in this manner of measurement, for in wet weather the chain would stretch, and in dry, hot weather the chain shrank and drew up. This early surveying and measurement of land has been the cause of quite a number of large lawsuits in later years.

In the western part of this State, where the country has not developed as much as it has in other sections and is sparsely settled, these old-time landmarked corners still exist, usually about a league apart. Up in the section of the country where you are there are so many farms that have been cut out of the old league blocks that once were there, that one is not so likely to run across these corners now.

Mexicans as a rule are a very polite race of people and nearly always try to agree with a man on most subjects. They thought that it would please you for them to say that your diagram was a sign of buried treasure, especially as you must have mentioned the matter first and they knew at what you were driving. Go to your county clerk and ask to see the early field-notes on that particular piece of land and see if that rock is not mentioned as a corner in the days before steel tapes came into use for measuring land.

You could try out your idea, though, if you have the time and dig in the neighborhood of the rock and see what you can find. I am afraid, though, that all of your work will be for nothing. Sorry that I can not give you the kind of information that you seek. If there is anything else that you want to know about the territory that I am covering I'll be glad to give all the assistance that I can.

When you get something for nothing, don't make the other fellow pay the postage on it.

Gold of Siberia

BE SURE to take some goods to trade with the natives:

Question:—"Will you please send me information about the mining in Siberia? Is there any gold there, and can it be brought to the United States? How much would it cost for four men to get an outfit to go there, and what would we have to take? What time of the year would it be best to go?"—F. Darling, Westwood, Calif.

Answer, by Capt. Oliver:—According to my personal observation and from information received on the ground from men who had pretty thoroughly prospected that region, nothing in the mineral line except lead can be expected in northeastern Siberia, and this is the only part of the country that I handle, but the following may be of interest, and you may take it for what it is worth.

I have just received a letter from an old partner of mine, who has been interested in Siberia since 1916, has made several trips there and should know what he is talking about. He says: "I have the dope on the Russian Government prospecting operations in the Okhotsk district in 1896-97-98, and there is just as good ground there within thirty miles of the coast, with plenty of timber and little frozen ground. Two fellows whom I helped launch their boat in Nome in 1920 came out last Fall with $340,000, the result of five men's labor for two years, so my intentions are," etc.

We had been previously discussing some ground on the Kolyma, which is known to be rich but very hard to get to.

You can't get into any part of Siberia on the Bering Sea before June, and if you wish to enter Bering Straits you must wait until about July 15th. The best way to get there is by going to Nome and getting a passage over on some small trader, on which you will have to furnish your own food and bedding. You will also have to furnish your own bedding from Seattle to Nome if you go second class.

Take with you a "sour-dough's outfit" minus cold-weather clothing, because you can trade for Winter clothing there, and it will be better and cheaper than you can possibly buy. You are in California, and there are many old Alaska miners right around you who can tell you better than I what a "sour-dough's outfit" consists of.

Trading-material should include, tobacco (smoking and chewing), calico, awning-material, sugar, flour, tea, 30-30 rifles and ammunition—the natives use no other—knives and axes, all of which should be of good quality, and some five-and-ten-cent jewelry to trade to the women.

Yes, there is undoubtedly gold in Siberia, and it can be brought out.

LOST TRAILS

NOTE—We offer this department of the "Camp-Fire" free of charge to those of our readers who wish to get in touch again with old friends or acquaintances from whom the years have separated them. For the benefit of the friend you seek, *give your own name if possible*. All inquiries along this line, unless containing contrary instructions, will be considered as intended for publication in full with inquirer's name, in this department, at our discretion. We reserve the right in case inquirer refuses his name, to substitute any numbers or other names, to reject any item that seems to us unsuitable, and to use our discretion in all matters pertaining to this department. Give also your own full address. We will, however, forward mail through this office, assuming no responsibility therefor. We have arranged with the Montreal *Star* to give additional publication in their "Missing Relative Column," weekly and daily editions, to any of our inquiries for persons last heard of in Canada. Except in case of relatives, inquiries from one sex to the other are barred.

TROOP K, Fifth Cavalry. Members Petry, Kelly, Thompson, G. O. or any others that were in Mexico in 1919; write to me—Address DON THOMPSON, care of Meadow Brook Club, Westbury, Long Island, N. Y.

"SNAKE-EYE SCOTTY." Sometimes known as "Side-Winder" Scott. Please send me your present address. Everything all right.—Address "Smith," care of *Adventure*.

TILLMAN, ALBERT. Last heard of was in Brest, France, in 1918 with D Battery, 133 F. A. 36 Division. Home address New York City. Any information will be appreciated.—Address Staff Sgt. CLYDE B. BAYLISS, U. S. M. C. Bakers and Cooks School, Parris Island, S. C.

COGHLAN, C. C. Last heard of in Joliet, Ill., in 1918 or 1919. Your old pal of Rawlins and Los Angeles would like to hear from you.—Address E. W. FIERCE, 107 Ellis St., Peoria, Ill.

GORDON, FRANK. Served in the 12th Battery, R. F. A., as gunner. Station Front 1918 and was discharged in 1919. Came home to Boston and resided on Blue Hill Avenue. Any information will be appreciated.—Address CHARLES WELLS, 37 Pleasant Ave., River Rouge, Mich.

VAN MARTER, FRANK E. Last heard of in or near Kill Buck, Pa., or Oil City, Pa. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address E. M. VAN MARTER AKINS, Box 92, Brookton, N. Y.

MANN, HERBERT, JR. Last heard of in Casper, Wyo. Age twenty-five, light complexion, brown hair and blue eyes. His father died January 16, 1924. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. HERBERT MANN, Bakerville, S. D.

DURNING, FRANK L. Last heard of in Hilo, Hawaii. Was oiler on S.S. *Hawkeye State* in 1923, may possibly be in Baltimore, Md. His old pal Gill of the S.S. *Westwood* wants to hear from him.—Address G. SCHRYVER, care of Maurice Schryver, Box 117, Lemon Grove, Calif.

Please notify us at once when you have found your man.

HOLLIS, CLARENCE C. Last heard of six or seven years ago. Age thirty-nine years, five feet eleven inches, weight about two hundred pounds, dark-brown eyes, dark-brown curly hair. Resident of Rochester, New York. Any information will be appreciated by his daughter.—Address MISS CLAIRE HOLLIS, 1127 Fairmont St., N. W., Washington, D. C.

FLEISCH, FLORENCE. Age about twenty-one years. Any information will be appreciated by her sister.—Address MRS. CLARA STEVENSON, care of *Adventure*.

HOLLAND, JAMES ARTHUR. Resident of Bismarck, North Dakota. Last heard from fifteen years ago in Sacramento, Calif. Six feet, blue eyes and brown curly hair. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address MISS HELEN HOLLAND, 832 29th Ave., Seattle, Wash.

BROTHER and two sisters. I was born October 15, 1875, near Bradford, Ill. Father died and children were placed in poor-house at Bradford, Ill. Doctor (tall, dark and slender) took my brother and two sisters. My brother was crippled. I was taken from the poor-house by Mr. and Mrs. John Denoyer, and they changed my name to Josephine Thompson. Any information will be appreciated.—Address MISS JOSEPHINE THOMPSON, Lock Box 359, Beatrice, Nebraska.

U. S. S. *CHICAGO*. Members of her crew from April 6, 1917, while in "Rio" and South American ports. Please communicate.—Address J. BURKE, 4339 Brown St. Phila., Pa.

KEITH, HENRY. Last heard of in Chicago, Ill., about July 10, 1923. Height about five feet eleven inches, black hair and black eyes. Probably in Detroit, Michigan. Any information will be appreciated by his mother.—Address MRS. R. W. KEITH, Route 2, Martel, Tenn.

POHL, FRANK. Resident of Philadelphia, Pa. Employed at the Frankfort Arsenal, 1917. Any information will be appreciated.—Address HARRY A. BOLGER, 824 Laguna St., San Francisco, Calif.

HINES, HUGH W. Last heard from in Arizona. Write at once mother is worried.—Address J. M. HINES, Box 123, Merkel, Texas.

BAKER, J. O. Your shipmate "Duke" of the Target Repair Party, U. S. S. *Nanshan* wants to hear from you. I have something that will suit your rambling nature.—Address R. I. DRAKE, 1463 Bryn Mawr Ave., Chicago, Ill.

WOULD like to hear from any ex-member of Battery A, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, Field Artillery Replacement Depot, Camp Zachary Taylor, Louisville, Ky., who remembers the two pictures taken of our battery some time during month of July, 1918. Two different pictures were taken, one being of the Battery in a semicircle. At this time First Lieutenant Rientz was acting battery-commander; Second Lieutenant Cummings was also in this battery. Any information will be appreciated.—Address JIM CALDWELL, Independent Wireless Telegraph Co., 35 Water St., N. Y. C.

LITTLE, THOMAS. Last heard of fifteen years ago when he was employed by a butcher by the name of D. J. Wellan, Kingston, Canada. Father's name Mordaunt John Little. Mother's name was Annabelle Gunning. Any information will be appreciated by his sister.—Address LOUISE LITTLE, 3819 Polk St., Chicago, Ill.

WOMEN MEMBERS of Camp-Fire please write to me.—Address ETHEL MAE AKINS, Box 92, Brookton, New York.

UNCLAIMED MAIL

GARLICK, CLYDE W.; Roe, Mrs. Virginia; Taylor, George W.

A LIST of unclaimed manuscripts will be published in the January 10th and July 10th issues of Adventure, and a list of unclaimed mail will be published in the last issue of each month.

THE following have been inquired for in either the May 20 or June 10, 1924 issues of Adventure. They can get the name and address of the inquirer from this magazine.

ADREON, LLOYD; Bedortha, Harry F.; Bernstein, Abe; Burns, Bob or Ralph Scott; Burough, Stanley; Bushby, Edward T.; Costelloe, Jack; Daly, Charles; Drinkard, Emary P.; Dunston, Arnold; Faries, Cecil R.; Garrabrandt, Anna B.; Garnier, Martin; Hadden, Charlie; Hart, David William; Holly, A. J.; Hooker, Lynn and Jake Archer; Johnson, Walter and Durcy; Kelly, John H.; Kephart, Steve, John, Peter; Le Mire, Mrs. Martha; Little, Mary Ann Weston; Margoski or Margowski, David; May, William, Sullivan; Nordahl, Thomas; Pruitt, John and Roy; Rahmer, William; Reed, Claude; Reger, Andrew (Emdre); Scanlon, Oliver J.; Spencer, Bert; Stevenson, I. J.; Ward, J. C.; Wilcox, A. N.; Willis, Frank; Woodward, Lee R.; Wood, Elmer.

MISCELLANEOUS—Chuck, Harris, Iiwabbe, Slim Hawkens, Big Clamence, Wild Bill Cody; Ed Larson, Tex Farrel, Kid Reynolds, Charles Warrant; Gus Hughes, Jean Stuarett, Short Murrey, Ed Rice of Dallas, Texas and Jack Kennedy. Would like to hear from any of the boys of Battery A, 2nd U. S. Field Artillery:

THE TRAIL AHEAD

JULY 10TH ISSUE

Besides the **three complete novelettes** mentioned on the second contents page of this issue, the next *Adventure* will bring you the following stories:

SOME AFTERNOON CALLS *Thomson Burtis*
A Border sheriff finds use for an airplane.

YELLOW BOOTS *William N. Vaile*
The bank-robber saw them everywhere he went.

THE FIGHT AT THE GO-DOWN *Magruder Maury*
They were going to roast the lieutenant over a slow fire.

PEARL-HUNGER A Five-Part Story Part II *Gordon Young*
The trouble started at the Gallows—the lowest gin-dive in Lianfo.

VIKINGS ADRIFT *F. St. Mars*
Three crows that flew with the storm.

THE HOLLOW MAST *Charles F. Emerich*
The sailor knew his ship.

THE WORD OF A HARD MAN *Raymond S. Spears*
The proud rancher got the tourists' car all dusty, and then things began to happen.

TO "BUGS"—AND BUTTERFLIES *Douglas Oliver*
Collecting insects on the Western Front was not a tame occupation.

Still Farther Ahead

THE three issues following the next will contain *long stories* by Hugh Pendexter, Frank C. Robertson, Georges Surdez, Leonard H. Nason, William Ashley Anderson, J. D. Newsom, A. D. H. Smith, Frederick Moore and Walter J. Coburn; and short stories by Barry Scobee, John Webb, Royce Brier, William Byron Mowery, Warren Hastings Miller, W. C. Tuttle, Magruder Maury, F. St. Mars, Raymond S. Spears and others; stories of Yankee cavalrymen in the World War, squatters in the Australian cow-country, conspirators in Abyssinia, Mexican revolutionaries on the Border, hard-case skippers on the Atlantic, prospectors on the American desert, fur-hunters in Labrador, Chinese bandits in the South Seas, viking-farers in prehistoric America, doughboys in the Philippines, smugglers in Chinese waters, adventurers the world around.

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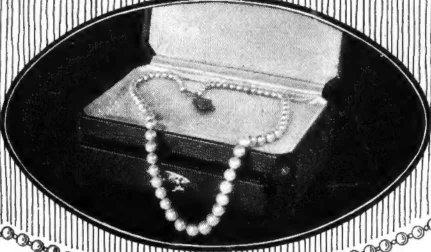

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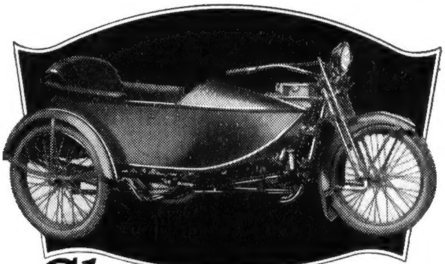

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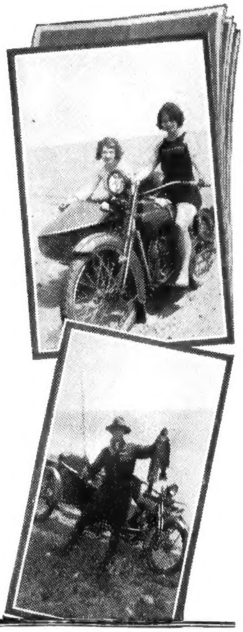
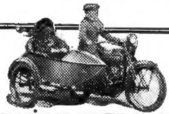


Harley-Davidson
The Motorcycle



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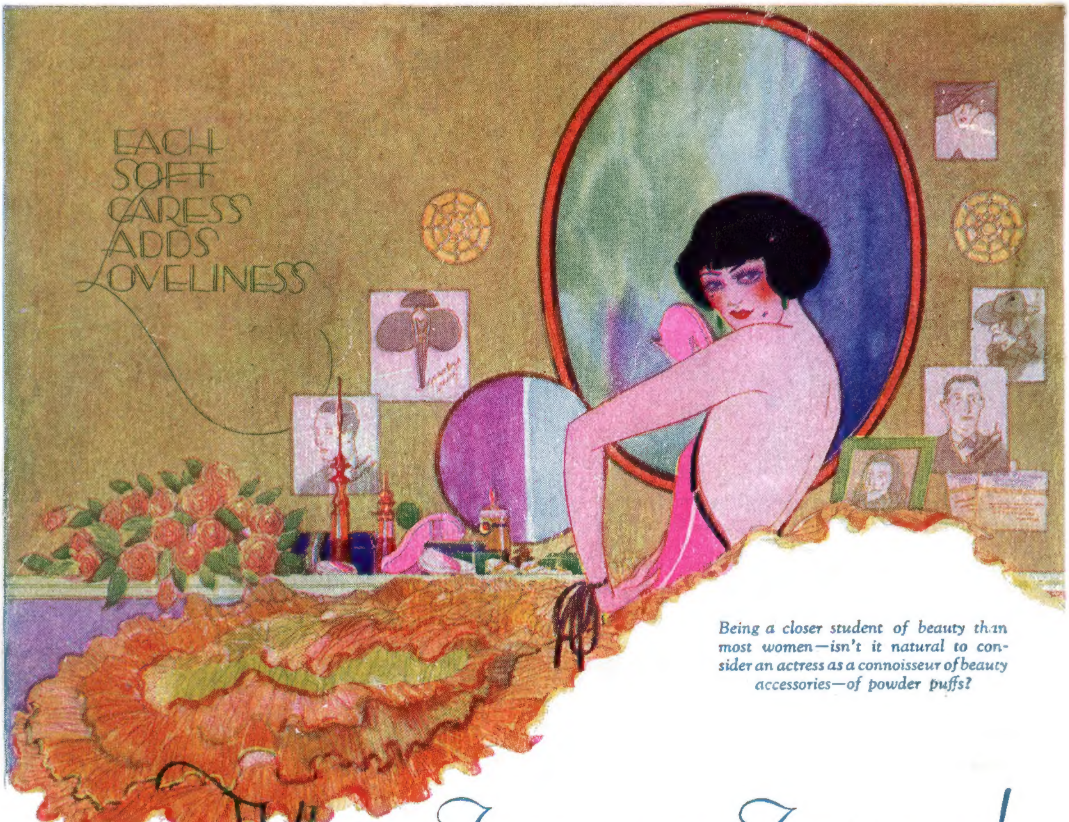
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